Globality: The Double Bind of African Migrant Writing

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Declaration

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I consider the political implications of the aporetic position of contemporary African migrant writing in the arena of world literature. For this type of writing, forever interpellated by the domain of the world literary marketplace, there is a discernible worldly causality that seems to have exceeded its enunciatory modality. Following Pheng Cheah's lead, I argue that the selected writing gestures towards a concern with a conception of the world beyond its merely spatial dimension which, at a certain hermeneutic level, would assume that globalisation creates a world. Because of this, I am interested in the more spiritual dimension of the narratives, more abstract than the concrete, visible presence of globalisation's physiognomy and physical border crossings. More important, this literature's worldly causality is to be found in those textual moments when it calls into question the very organising philosophy, the temporal force, of our era of globalisation. I argue that the works offer us a discursive and imaginative space from which to consider some of the economic implications of migrant life framed by global capitalism. Yet, this happens in a rather radical way when the writing enters the personal and tender zones of utterance, where the personal attributes interact with the juridical predispositions of migrancy. In doing this, significantly, the writing seems to suggest a deferral or diverting of the call of the ethnographic imperative which would have African migrant writing respond to all manner of calls that are put out, all of which seek to delimit and make recognisable so-called 'African' literature. The source of the call is quite specific, though it does not mean that it is singular. It therefore emerges that, as they pertain to African writing, our reading practices seem overdetermined by a curious predisposition, they seek to make individual voices intelligible according to a particular structure of recognition. This anticipated rubric, or the unique stage directions established for contemporary African writing, the narrowly conceived socio-political problems it is expected to address ahead of its arrival, has the effect of subsuming African writing into the logic of commodity markets.

In their own ways, these texts seem to be answering a call for the capaciousness of African writing in content and form, where the challenge is to render art that is not eclipsed by the demands of group representation or the ethnographic imperative within the realm of world literature. These works thus seem to indicate a refusal to be interpellated by pre-established criteria about identiarian politics, while they activate our imagination towards globality. In the same breath, I consider the structural interpellation that forces writers to negotiate what I call the double bind of African migrant writing, two contradictory

injunctions issued at the same time. This double bind, between the market's demand for the ethnographic imperative (or something like (un)strategic ethnification) and the framing of the linguistic operation of globality as cultural globalization, may prove instructive for our approach to African migrant writing. True to the structure of a double bind, African migrant writers cannot 'solve' or escape the double bind of their positionality, they can only negotiate it. Thus, an important point of departure will be to highlight the discursive difference between, on the one hand, globalisation (the globalising protocols, processes and effects) and on the other hand, globality (the end state of globalisation). The hermeneutic value of the term globality lies in its simultaneous difference and sameness from the term globalisation, it mobilises the dialectic analogous to that which operates when we theorise different but complementary entities such as race and colour, sex and gender, class and poverty, citizen and nationality and so forth, now, globality and globalisation. In other words, the relation between globality and globalisation seems to inhabit a continuous space where globalisation stands for the processes and modes by which the ideological project of global markets, immigration and transcultural movement on a global scale, operates to conceal the force of capitalism, so that we think of globalisation as a quasi-natural phenomenon, about which little can be done. I suggest that prevailing literary approaches to African migrant writing will need to be supplemented by an ethical politics of reading, one that centres the status of globality. With such a reading practice, we may arrive at a new enunciatory register that captures the ontology of transnationalism beyond merely the anthropologies of 'the immigrant experience' of displacement or unbelonging and a critique of Euro-Americanism, so that the texts complicate our relationship to global capital at the same time as they throw the chaos of globality, and global capitalism, into sharp relief.

Isishwankathelo

Kulo mqulu, ndicinga ngeempembelelo zezopolitiko ezicetyiswa ngumbono oyilahleko, kwimibhalo yabafundi bakutshanje baseAfrika kwixesha leencwadi kwihlabathi. Ndiphicotha iincwadi ezikhethiweyo zababhali base-Afrika abangasahlali kweli. Ngalo mbhalo, nento esoloko ichazwa zimalike zemibhalo yehlabathi, kukho imeko yehlabathi emayana ebonakalayo kwa nebonakala ngathi idlulile ekuchazeni iindlela zobume bemibhalo. Ngokulandela isikhokelo sikaPheng Cheah, ndixoxa ngelithi ababhali abangasahlali kweli lase-Afrika abachongiweyo, kukho intshukumo exhalabisayo, nekwinqanaba elithile elaziwa ngokuba yi-hermeneutic, iza kuthi ihlabathikazi lidala ilizwe. Ngenxa yoku, ndinomdla ngakumbi kwimeko equka iingxoxo yakwamoya, into esemoyeni ngaphezu kwebambekayo, ukubonakala konxibelelwano kwihlabathikazi, kwakunye nokucada imida yamazwe. Okubaluleke ngakumbi, olu ncwadi lumayana lelizwe lufumaneka kule mibhalo, apho lubuza khona ifilosofi equlunqiweyo, unyanzelo labumini, kumathuba apho ilizwe linxibelelana ngakumbi. Ndixoxa ukuba imisebenzi isinika inxaxheba ecacileyo kunye nendawo apho kufuneka sicinge ngeziphumo zoqoqosho zababhali abangasahlali e-Afrika ngokuphathelele kubukhapitali jikelele. Naxakunjalo, oku kwenzeka kwindlela engacengiyo xa ukubhala kungena kumanqanaba ahlukeneyo nokuthetha, apho iimpawu zobuqu zibandakanyeka nezigwebo zomthetho kubabhali abangasahlali e-Afrika. Ukwenza oku, ngokucacileyo, lo mbhalo uzama ukucebisa indlela eyahlukileyo nebiza kuhlobo lokuphanda elibizwa i-ethnography, eza kwenza ababhali abangasahlali e-Afrika baphendule kuzo zonke iinkalo ezivelayo, nezizama ukunciphisa kwaye zenze ukuba kubekho ababhali ababizwa ngokuba ngabase-Afrika. Umthombo wokuba babizwe ngoluhlobo untsokothile, nangona ungathethi ukuba uhamba wodwa. Ngoko ke oku kuthetha ukuba, xa bebizwa ngokuba ngababhali base-Afrika abangasahlali kweli lizwekazi, imikhwa yethu yokufunda icebisa ukuba oko kwenziwa ngokugqithisileyo kwiindawo esime kuzo, bazama ukwenza amazwi owodwa ukuba achubeke ngokwendlela ethile, neyayanyiswe ngokubizwa okuthile. Indlela aba babhali ababizwa ngayo yenza ukuba kunciphe ukujonga umsebenzi wabo, koko babonwa njengabo bajonga iingxaki zentlalontle nopolitiko, kananjalo kujongwa ukuba bona banohlobo oluthile ababhala ngalo, ezo ziziphumo ezibonakalisa ukuncipha ngokwendlela ababizwa ngayo nkqubo.

Ngokwendlela yayo, le mibhalo ibonakala ukuba iphendula ukukrokreleka kokuba imibhalo yase-Afrika iqulathe imingeni ebonisa isakhono esikuxinezelelo lokuba amaqela afunda le mibhalo andawoni kwimimango yokubhalwa koncwadi. Le mibhalo kungoko izama ukubonisa ukungafuni ukuba ababhali bachazwe ngendlela esekwe ngaphambili ebabonisa

ukuba bajonge icala elithile lezopolitiko, nangona bethatha iingcamango zethu bazise kumazwe ahlukeneyo.

Okuqhagamishelana noko, ndiphakamisa ubume obuchazwa njengobunyanzela ababhali bakhangele into abangayaziyo kuba kusithiwa ngabase-Afrika, apha kukho iinkalo ezimbini ekufuneka zijongwe ngaxeshanye. Le mbophelelo intlandlo-mbini, ephakathi kwabashishini ngokwe-ethnography (okanye into ebizwa (un)strategic ethnification) nokwakhiwa kolwimi olusebenza jikelele kwilizwe lonke njengenkcubeko, kungabonakalisa ulutho kwindlela esijonga ngayo ababhali base-Afrika abangekho kweli lizwekazi. Okusenyanisweni kobu bume bembophelelo entlandlo-mbini, ababhali abangasahlali e-Afrika abanakho ukusombulula iingxaki ngemibhalo yabo, basebenza pantsi kwento eyabekwa kudala nebenza bangakwazi ukuveza iimbono zabo. Kungoko kubalulekile njengendlela yokuya phambili, kuxelwe indlela ekunokucetywa ngayo ezinkalo zahlukileyo, okokuqala, ubuzwekazi (indlela ilizwekazi elilandela ngayo iimeko, ukwenza kunye neziphumo) kananjalo kwelinye inqanaba, ukuphela kobuzwekazi (ukuphelisa unxibelelwano phakathi kwamazwe ehlabathi). Eyona njongo nefuthe le gama elithetha ngobuzwekazi, bulele kwindlela ezimbini iyantlukwano nobunye obusuka kweli gama lithetha ukuthi amazwekazi ehlabathi. Iququzelela iimeko apho kusetyenziswa ubunye nekuthi xa sisakha iithiyori kuze iinkalo ezahlukileyo kodwa ziqukwe zifana, nobuhlanga kunye nebala, ubuni, ukungalingani, kunye nendlala, ubumi, kunye nobumi ngokwelizwe njalo njalo, ngoku zibonwa nje ngelizwekazi. Ngamanye amagama, unxibelelwano phakathi kobuzwekazi namazwe ehlabathi kubonakala kuvalela isithuba esiqhubekayo apho ubuzwekazi bumele iinkqubo kunye neendlela apho iimbono zamazwe emalike zehlabathi, iimfuduko nokudibanisa iinkcubeko ezahlukeneyo kwilize jikelele, kusebenze ngenjongo yokuvingca ubukhapitali, ukuze sicinge ngobuzwekazi njengento edaliweyo nekufanele ukuba yenzeke, nalapho kukuncinane ekunokwenzeka. Ngokufunda okunjalo, kungenzeka sifike kwindlela yerejista engabonakaliyo entsha, nethatha kwi-ontology yeengunqu zelizwe ngaphezu kwezinto ezinziwa ngababhali, nokubekela kude okanye ukungafikeleli kunye nokuhlaba amadlala kumazwe asemantla/ entshona, ukuze imibhalo icele imingeni kunxibelelwano lwethi nobukhapitali kumazwe ehlabathi ngaxeshanye babe besenza ukuba kungabikho lawuleko kubuzwe, nobukhapitali bamazwe ehlabathi.

For Pollux Frei

come celebrate with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

---- Lucille Clifton

Contents

Acknowledgements and Preface

I.

I owe a debt of gratitude to so many people and forces that, together, enabled me to complete this dissertation. My genuine thanks go to my supervisors, Tina Steiner and Megan Jones. I appreciate their attentive and careful reading. From the very beginning, they have pushed me for clarity by not accepting shoddy structure, and by insisting that a sentence, a paragraph or that still-forming idea could always aim for greater lucidity. I have them to thank for guiding this dissertation to what is hopefully a place of intelligibility. Not least because of the nuts and bolts, a dissertation requires something like a project management team to see it through its successful completion, Tina and Megan have been outstanding in that respect.

I wrote the bulk of this dissertation in Berlin where, thanks to a grant from the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust, I was fortunate enough to have been welcomed as a visiting fellow at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin's Institut für Asien-und Afrikawissenschaften. For embracing me kindly, I thank my wonderful host supervisor, Susanne Gehrmann, who always showed such compassion and patience throughout the writing process. I would also like to register my gratitude to Susanne for her continuing encouragement of my ideas and thoughts, for always offering constructive feedback and direction to this project, and for giving me the opportunity to think through these ideas with colleagues at the Institute.

I don't think it is a stretch to say that the general outlines of this project emerged to me in 2015, during the student protests that sought to connect the lack of transformation at universities to broader social justice issues in the country. Thinking back now, it seems to me that we cannot take the ethical impulse of the post-revolutionary subject for granted. Far from being an apocryphal statement, the fact that 'a political liberation is not a revolution' was evident in the way many of the students involved in the protests would speak about 'economic freedom.' Quite often when it was invoked, I had the sense that the term did not signal so much the destruction of capitalism's hegemonic grip, as it did a plea, on the part of some black people, to be considered on equal terms, freedom perhaps, to participate equally in the capitalist economy and to be able take advantage of it, to grab its full potential in the historic way that white people had under apartheid. This desire, at a certain level, tells us something about the impairment of the collective political imagination in a time of globality. This is exactly where a literary training of the imagination would come in. I know that curriculum reform alone will hardly bring about a liberated world, but there is at least

something to be said about the responsibility of a humanities education, its role in developing the mind-sets that can apprehend a revolutionary moment to come, an epistemology that can outlive the moment of liberation. This of course hints at the relation between ideological reproduction, the role of education (the university), and the enduring forms of structural violence in the post-apartheid state. For always helping me see and appreciate these connections, I am sincerely grateful to my dear friend and comrade, Kylie Thomas, who believed in me and this dissertation. Always willing to read various drafts of chapters, she has been the most engaging and consummate reader and interlocutor I could ask for, and I thank her immensely for her friendship and intellectual motivation.

I want to put on record my sincerest appreciation and gratitude to Manosa Nthunya, with whom I've had invaluable conversations about the status of African literature. Manosa always took the time to offer considered responses to my drafts, and I would like to thank him for consistently introducing insightful provocations that stretched my argument further. I must also thank Ian Currie for commenting on Chapter One. I have benefited so much from Ian's support, and I am especially thankful for his love and remarkable friendship. Other people who read early versions of a chapter include, Wamuwi Mbao, Sergio Alloggio, Charlott Schönwetter. There is also Alan Muller who, apart from reading Chapter Five and offering useful comments, made his apartment the best getaway at a crucial time. Simthembile Xeketwana was kind enough to help me by translating the abstract into Xhosa, and I'm grateful for his attention. A shout out to Noizee Mngomezulu, who swiftly responded with tenderness and support when I hit the panic button.

Outside the dissertation (although strictly speaking there has been no outside of it) I have too many friends to whom I give thanks, but I will just mention a few who know will immediately know why: Rebecca Elsele, Friederike Risse, Maren Voege, Johannes Trube, Steffi Schankweiller, and special mention to Jérôme Thierry. I also thank Jota Mombaça and Pollux Frei for the much-needed intellectual stimulation during the final lap of this marathon, for discussions that pumped me up as I approached the (un)finish line, for reminding me about the right to opacity. How does one account for a moment such as that when the trace of an energising telephone conversation with a friend unconsciously finds its way onto the page? I thought about this whenever I talked to Julie Nxadi, who has always expanded my thinking, and who brought a lightness of being with her thundering laughter and joy, her radical love. Finally, I want to give a special thanks to my wonderful partner Luke Cadden, for always lending me his imaginative and engaging mind, and for whom I have the deepest

affection and love. My most generous interlocutor, it's hard to imagine what this project would look like without him, it simply would not exist.

II.

This dissertation began with a simple question: what, structurally speaking, are the abstract elements that militate against the world-making potential of African migrant writing? Reflecting on this same question now, I have found it useful to begin with the structural limitations inherent in my own writing experience, the processes of my own undertaking here. Given the determinant institutional constraints with which any doctoral student is intimately familiar, I found during my own writing that, to a certain degree, I was myself facing a type of writerly disquiet, wrestling, for one thing, with the omniscient presence of the examiner as reader. If I was often looking over my shoulders while writing this dissertation, possibly anticipating how a particular sentence will be received, or agonising over what would be allowed to pass through the tightly patrolled borders of scholarly practice, such a moment of agony could perhaps represent my being haunted by the shadow of some abstract authority. Far from positing a self-referential false equivalence, my insinuation here is simply that the relation to the other, by which I mean not merely the corporeal or human other, but also that which constitutes an infinite ethical relation, this structural positionality, is experienced in quite significant ways by the writers that I examine in this thesis. As African writers of a new generation, they find themselves, it seems, fully interpellated at the very moment that the subject of 'African literature' is brought up.

This might explain why many diasporic writers have their backs against the wall when they are questioned about their relation to the continent. It was exactly such a moment, at an African Literature conference in 2013, that lead the Ethiopian American author Maaza Mengiste to mark her frustration with this peculiarly stultifying signifier. "A question was asked almost immediately: do you consider yourself an African writer?" She recalls her perplexity in the company of her co-panellists, two African woman writers:

> We each needed to pause before answering; we had to wait for translators to repeat the inquiry in our respective languages. None of us spoke the same language, and none of the languages being translated from German were indigenous to the countries where we were born. Yet the question didn't take that into consideration. It was so broad as to be disconcertingly limiting, yet it wasn't the first time I'd heard it and it wouldn't be the last. It seems that every new writer with any remote connection to the

> continent of Africa, either willingly or unwillingly, has first to wrestle with this question of identity before talking about what should matter most: their book. (Mengiste para 1)

Mengiste's matter of fact tone, her anticipation of the repeatability of this question, captures how simple and yet how complex my concern is. Mengisti is part of a long list of authors who object to this labelling practice, she is evidently frustrated by the limitations that are inherent to the term 'African writer', she is uneasy about the authorial and readerly restrictions, the straight-jacketing that follows the question mark, or that converts it into a speech act.[1] I want to inhabit this frustration a little, linger with it just a while, in order to understand its phenomenological outlines, as well as its relation to the reading habits that have been cultivated for African migrant writing. For every writer who refuses this term, there are as many who embrace it, finding it enabling and affirming in some way.[2] At the same time, I am not as such interested in the identiarian aspect of the question of this designation. Rather, I am concerned with the conditions of possibility for a response, any response, to that question. I am interested in the structural ways in which both a refutation or disavowal, indeed a refusal to be named 'African writer', or, otherwise, an embrace, an acquiescence, an affirming response to the term, are always already surrendered to the structure of interpellation. What are the literary and political implications of this positionality?

Let me situate these prologomenal remarks by taking cover and recalling a moment when, in her book-length Preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Spivak mentions that it is in the very nature of the preface to wrestle with its relationship to the rest of the text. In fact, "the preface harbours a lie" since its very essence is "a pretence at writing *before* a text that one must have read *before* the preface can be written" (xii). Like all dissertations, written on the shoulders of intellectual giants, my influences will be clear, although it will be worth mentioning that I have tried to imagine writing this dissertation as something that would function like grounding notes for an extended conversation with Gayatri Spivak, by which I also mean the *oeuvre*, the collective of her texts. Spivak is perhaps somewhat like a lexicon for me, hence, part of my effort in this dissertation is to cultivate something that could be

[1] This anxiety of affiliation has been the subject of numerous online articles on African literature, See: Adesokan, Akin. "I'm not An African Writer. Damn You!" *Chimurenga Chronic*, 20 Dec 2013.
[2] See: Flanagin, Jack. "An African Writer Who Doesn't Mind Being Called an 'African Writer'" *The Atlantic*, 18 Sep 2013.

called an ethical politics of reading. In this case, I find myself veering into identification overdrive with Spivak, holding tightly onto the lifeline she offers in the throes of our disciplinary practices beset by the increasing trivialisation of the humanities by market imperatives. Spivak's intervention is the nestled in the idea of a literary enterprise that can 'train the imagination for epistemological performance'. If this is to be done, it is with the view to developing democratic intuitions that can outlive liberation. In a Spivakian vocabulary, therefore, an aesthetic education, a literary education, is poised to intervene in our imaginings of world. Rather than give the world to us as we know it, the world of global capitalism, the literary imagination brings with it the element of the incalculable, a contingent supplement which must consistently be slanted towards fostering a will to social justice for all. In a way, this thesis follows the impulse of one version of such an incalculable element, what I call the spirit of the text, which calls for attention in the African migrant writing that I consider. Of course, wanting to protect myself from the ill-fated life of a speculative thesis statement, I summon the forces of the intellectual troops, deploying an ethics of citationality by calling upon an army of philosophical figures to defend my claims about the irresolvable aporia of contemporary African writing, its ambivalent position in the world that produces it and that, it appears, it produces in turn.

Yet it seems any question about African migrant literature will have to begin with this predicament, since to think about African migrant writing is to consider the question of interpellation, the precise moment when the one who is named 'African writer' becomes the subject of an ideological matrix. Interpellation is exactly the process by which a hegemonic ideology constitutes the very identity of the subject by calling her, hailing her into existence. This is Louis Althusser's domain. Interpellation, in his famous essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" is the move from being an individual to being a concrete subject, which subject is an embodiment of ideological power. For Althusser, this process of being transformed from being an individual to subject, interpellation, stands for one mode by which power reproduces itself and it "can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (174). This a quasi-foundational sense of existence, and Althusser directs us to the mundane processes of recognition in our daily lives, in order to grasp our complicity with the reproduction of power. "Assuming" Althusser writes, "that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round" (170). Keeping our folded togetherness in mind, an ethical relationality is established: "by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject.* Why? Because he has recognized that the hail

was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed' (and not someone else)" (170). The banality of abstract hegemonic power is what is at stake here, so Althusser is obliged to say that ideology, subjecthood and interpellation reinforce each other, and that the process of interpellation is not governed by cause and effect since "in reality these things happen without any succession" (171). Importantly, Althusser proposes that "the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing" (171), the individual is always already a subject. This point seems to end in the fact that, in the arena of world literature, contemporary African migrant writing is held within a double bind, since to speak about African migrant writing is to invoke a structural folded togetherness with the other side. This phenomenon, a double bind, constitutes a particular thread intractably woven into the fabric of these texts. When we invoke such designations as 'African writer', 'African literature' or even, as the Caine Prize prefers, 'African short story', what sort of discursive inventories emerge with the utterance?

From a related theoretical point of departure to Althusser, let me considered another iteration of the answerability of the call by the other, where the terms 'African literature' or 'African writer' are still subject to interrogation. If we are to take Judith Butler's path to subject formation in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, then the scene of address, which is the scene of interpellation, marks the contingency of my relational existence. This would mean, for instance, that in the presence of such a question as 'are you an African writer?' I may set out to disavow the question, by asking what is meant by African writing in the first place. That being so, Butler's elaboration prefigures the conditions of possibility for self-narration. In accounting for the legitimacy of a dispassionate response such as 'what is African literature in the first place?', we could assume that this reply is a refusal of interpellation. Butler eloquently outlines the impossibility of giving an account of myself, or even of withholding responsiveness from the interpellator, without referring to the specific social conditions under which I emerge. A dispassionate response or even silence in the face of the other "calls into question the legitimacy of the authority invoked by the question and the questioner or attempts to circumscribe a domain of autonomy that cannot or should not be intruded upon by the questioner" (12). That means if the writer refuses to respond to the call issued by the other, "[t]he refusal to narrate remains a relation to narrative and to the scene of address. As a narrative withheld, it either refuses the relation that the inquirer presupposes or changes that relation so that the one queried refuses the one who queries" (12). I am interested in exactly such a structure of deterministic relation to the other, and the ways in which writers negotiate this double bind inherent in their positionality. Since I am in search

of that which is sometimes taken for granted in African migrant writing, I gravitate towards the micrological elements of the texts, and there I find the figure of globality in the everyday, the unspectacular textual moments, the microscopic spec or trace in the social fabric of the text, those instances which tend to fly under the identiarianist radar that is commonly relied upon in our diagnostic approaches to the genre. An ethical politics of reading proceeds from the view that our existing condition of globality, which these texts enunciate, is the proper name of global capitalism, self-actualised and triumphant.

When I set out to write about the double bind of contemporary African migrant writing, I had an inchoate sense of the worlding quality of the texts. They are: NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), E.C. Osondu's *Voice of America* (2010), Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007), Tayie Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011). The selection in this thesis thus represents the texts that seemed to perform subtle gestures of futurity, suggesting that they could open up an ethico-political horizon that might enable readers not only to imagine alternative worlds, as with speculative fiction, but also to question the very essence of the 'world' as we know it, the everyday as imbricated in structures of violence. With globality and the idea of an implacable writerly double bind as my analogic framework for reading African migrant writing, it is useful to acknowledge that of course a number of other works stage similar literary modalities. And while I have taken care not to approach the selected works with the view to ventriloquize them, making them stand in for something determined in advance, it has nevertheless been difficult to consider the ontology of globality without the recurring echo of Benjamin's sense of temporal urgency when he writes that "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (257).

It goes without saying that different readers will be animated by entirely different constellation of books, but to the extent that my assemblage is deliberate, I am particularly interested in the works that instantiate the writer's first appearance on the world literary stage. Thus, the debut book as the first moment of an ongoing process of interpellation. It must be noted that Teju Cole's 2011 book *Open City* is not, strictly speaking, a debut novel, as it is often mischaracterised. His actual debut, *Everyday is for the Thief*, was first published in 2007 in Nigeria, and then later re-published in the U.S. after the success of *Open City*. If this is a moment of consecration, the very fact that *Open City* can displace and substitute Cole's actual first book, means that the circuit through which African writing becomes

visible is itself a component of the relational existence of African literature in the world literary space.

Introduction

The 'World' of World Literature

To think Globality, is to think the politics of thinking globality.
--- Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*

This thesis explores the positionality of contemporary African migrant writing and its structural interpellation in globalisation. The works under consideration quite clearly suggest a 'transnational' or 'global subjectivity' in which characters (like their authors) exist in an in-between space. Such a space or structural duality, and the violent interruption of authorial genius, opens up both potentialities as well as limitations in the works' narrative techniques. c

The works by contemporary African migrant writers in this thesis employ a particularly curious narrative mode in accounts of life in 'the homeland' and abroad. These texts may at times suggest a concern with cultural pluralism, or questions about identity in globalisation, but they are not merely exemplary of the space of cultural intensities that produces them. My sense of the selected texts is that they possess a quality worth exploring; they refuse to be interpellated and made to stand in simply as an account of migrant identitarianism and a concern with culturalism. The writing in this thesis is indeed about the predicaments of identity in the diaspora, but is it really only about that? Thinking through this question, I propose that these works can have an indispensable function in contemporary society if they can be read for their spiritual impulses, by which I mean those aspects of the texts that go beyond the transparency of a predetermined sociological account of the writing. Instead, the spiritual impulse of the text forms part of the general element of the unverifiable in literature. It is a concern with relative opacity, rather than the uniformity or implied totality of preconceived reading practices that organise our approaches to contemporary African migrant writing. The spiritual impulse of the text, as I understand it, challenges the class-obscuring culturalism of identity politics, it draws our attention to globalisation in literature not merely as the reflected site of cultural production, but also as the space that reproduces the material realities and struggles of global capitalism. Looking at the overlap in form and content, I explore the ways in which African migrant writing can do more than merely reflect the logic of commodity markets. To that extent, this chapter works through the paraconcept of 'the world', attempting to show how 'genuine' human sociality in the world is not merely comprised of, or modelled after, the relation between objects in the world literary

marketplace. I should therefore begin by stating what I will not be doing in this thesis. I do not deal so much with a reading of world literary history in any periodising fashion, nor do I focus on the question of genre, although some of the textual analysis in the dissertation have implications for a reading concerned with aspects of genre.

Implicit in this thesis is that a cultural pluralism that disavows the latent presence of the capitalist mode of production, especially in the subtle uneven economic processes that the texts gesture towards, which are at the core of globalisation, may risk the minoritisation of the immigrant by merely turning her into an anthropological unit, there to be subsumed by readerly expectations pertaining to cultural cosmopolitanism or even Afropolitanism. I thus intend to explore the limitations and potentialities that such a position might proffer. I take conceptions of 'globalisation' and the implications of being-in-ethical-relation to the other, the source of the writerly double bind, as the locus of my study, and undertake readings of the work of six contemporary African novelists, namely, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), E.C. Osondu's *Voice of America* (2010), Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007), Tayie Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011). All these works, interestingly, deal with the pain of exile, whether voluntary or forced migration, demonstrating that in contemporary migration 'arrival' and 'departure' are nebulous if not deceptive terms. "How was I supposed to live in America," the narrator-protagonist in Mengestu's novel wonders, "when I had never really left Ethiopia?" (140). The six works of migrant writing I look at portray life in the global margins. In Bulawayo's novel, Darling, the protagonist, finally realises her dream of seeking refuge in America, a move that enables the reader a glimpse of the life of immigrants as disenfranchised groups – from the structural injustice that forces menial or manual labour upon them, to their obligations to send money back home while attempting to provide a sustainable living in the adopted homeland. While these writers emerge from different socio-geographical backgrounds, they are brought together by their contemporaneity in the arena of migrant literature, as well as their uneasy relationship with 'marginality', and an expected 'resistance' (the identiarian sort), which I will argue are at once the blessing and the curse of migrant writing.

If there is a catch-all term for this type of literary production, we may say it is 'world literature,' significant precisely for its ability to arrange an encounter between readers and the world depicted in the texts. This idea of a sociality extended by the works which are forever in cultural translation recalls Goethe. I begin with the Enlightenment Era's spiritualist conception of 'world', if only to trace in it the fissures of commonly accepted axioms with

respect to cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, in search of a normative view of '*welt'* in *Weltliteratur*. A great deal has been written about African migrant writers and the forms of subject formation attendant with their diasporicity. However, many of these studies do not register a strong enough appreciation of the role played by conceptions of the world that date back to the Enlightenment Era's anthropocentric turn. By failing to do so, these studies do not come to interrogate the social and discursive construction of our contemporary moment as inextricably bound up with the institutional epistemology of the inaugurators of such conceptions as cosmopolitanism and world literature, from which it has been argued, globalisation is an epiphenomenon. A reading of the contemporary theories of the globalisation and circulation of African migrant writing leads us on to a necessary thoroughfare with aesthetics and world literature and the temporal dimensions of globality.

Compulsory globalisation. Or, what is globality?

There is an instructive moment in Benita Parry's essay, "The Institutionalization of Postcolonial Studies," in which she suggests that any useful theory in transnational literature and postcolonial studies, while it cannot surrender its theoretical grammar, must nevertheless stage a "theoretical sophistication that has marked its engagement" with discourses of "Eurocentricism, and the exegetics of representation" as well as "to link such meta-critical speculations with studies of actually existing political, economic, and cultural conditions, past and present" (80). This is one important signpost, a methodological directive, on my path to unpacking world literature. There is, as such, nothing novel about the contemporary moment, as Saskia Sassen reminds us in *Territory, Authority, Rights*. Globality is not an altogether 'new' phenomenon – the concept of the national state is itself an enabler of globalisation. For Sassen, "a good part of globalization consists of an enormous variety of micro-processes that begin to denationalize what had been constructed as national – whether policies, capital, political subjectivities, urban spaces, temporal frames, or any other of a variety of dynamics and domains" – so that the border and the nation state are, paradoxically, required in order for capital to assume its transnational character (2). Globalisation, though, assumes a somewhat doctrinal order, but moving without any transcendental signifier, and gaining a kind of "attraction" from its "seductively irresistible" rhetoric (123). This may account for why, meditating about globalisation's aura, desire and the politics of representation, R. Radhakrishnan can state that:

> [T]he triumphalism of globality has to do with the fact that it seems to emanate from reality itself even as it speaks persuasively for that reality. As a *fait accompli*, globality presents itself both as reality and as a representation of that reality, all within a unified temporality. It is as though the very essence of reality is global; therefore, any attempt at interrogating globality would be nothing short of discrediting reality itself. (88)

As I will show in this thesis, this rather bleak view of the contemporary moment is wholly consistent with the thrust of temporal politics, and global capitalism's decimation of the imagination and futurity, a world away from the ruins of capitalism's plunder. In this dissertation, I argue for an approach to African migrant writing that privileges the spiritual dimensions of the works, which justifies my investigation of the conceptions of world literature. I am interested in the relation between the selected works and their responses to the predicament of globality. Before I launch into a discussion of globality and world literature, it will be important to state that any critique or analysis of globalisation as represented in various forms of world literature will hinge on theorems that are firmly rooted in the North Atlantic discursive space, despite the self-declared radicality and the autocritique often claimed by postcolonial theory proper.

There has been a great body of work that addresses the migrancy of contemporary African writers and that attempts to examine the material realities of their multiple worlds and languages.[3] The significance and vision of such work notwithstanding, the criticism I have in mind nevertheless stages a considerably different function to my concerns in *Globality: The Double Bind of African Migrant Writing*. Critics often proceed from a spatialist understanding of the world, so from the accepted notion of globality, they deal in other words, with the end-state of globalisation. Rather than delineating a process that we call globalisation, our sense of the contemporary moment reflects a quasi-permanent state. We could say, more accurately, critics are concerned with globality, the point at which globalisation's imperatives (as primarily a force of cultural creolisation) have apparently been 'reached', and the point at which temporality has been overcome. What this dissertation

[3] I acknowledge here, for instance, Brenda Cooper's well-argued book *A New Generation of African Writers: Migration, Material Culture & Language* which, as the title suggests, deals with some of the ways in which writers use the (English) language not simply as a nomenclature or within a semiotic system, but as a constant negotiation in finding ways of articulating their fractured realities and multiple lives or identities. A more recent collection of essays edited by Helen Cousins, entitled *Diaspora and Returns in Fiction* (2016), also tracks identity of African migrant writing in this way.

attempts to do, contrarily, is to apply some pressure to the very implication that globalisation exists primarily at the level of cultural production first, where the world seems secondary to the production process which destroys all sociality and makes production, the scene of homogenous abstract value and circulation, a goal and end in itself (Cheah 70).

Yet, this is surely not to reduce the power of predominant literary practice. Put simply, I intend to show that the texts hint at significant levels or tiers of the globalising process, characterised by ethico-political peculiarities as well as economic eventuation that have, hitherto, rarely been sublated into current epistemological assertions in contemporary globalisation. In other words, there is a curious degree to which prevailing methodological procedures, in analyses of migrant and diasporic subjects, focus almost plainly on cultural manifestations as though authorial positionality and autonomy were a matter simply of cultural interstition or identitarian politics. In highlighting the machinations of cultural conscription on a global scale, I argue that while certain globalising protocols, processes and effects indeed exist, there is a sense in which the pluralism of globalisation does not exist, except as a universalising capitalist tendency that conflates space and time. Indeed, writes Imre Szeman, even though such analyses of cultural pluralism, often conducted by leading scholars, are interesting and certainly productive, there is:

> [n]evertheless a way in which they are all too willing to take globalisation at face value. They acquiesce to the character and priority of capital's own transnational logics and movements, instead of questioning and assessing more carefully the narrative that underlies them. (155)

And so, globalisation in the first instance is in the form of global capital. This thesis will necessarily show that while there is surely a need for criticism to "concentrate its own energies on movement and border-crossings", this criticism is perhaps a delayed reaction to a crisis that is overdetermined by capitalism. As Szeman puts it, our attention to movement, mobility and identity in world literature "comes across as a rearguard manoeuvre to catch up with phenomena that have already taken place at some other more meaningful or important level" (155). As I will go on to show in this thesis, the subtle difference between globality and globalisation should be considered in the same way as we habitually conceive of complementary paradigms and relationships between such entities as race and colour, sex and gender, class and poverty and so forth. How does the relation between globalisation and globality come to inhabit a continuous space? If globalisation does not merely stand for the productive mode by which the ideological project of global markets, immigration and transcultural movement on a global scale pitches a reconfigured brand of epistemic and

temporal destruction, what other possible dimensions might it suggest? The 2008 financial crisis resuscitated the debates about capitalism proper, which had until then been subsumed by the processes of globalisation as expected of any state.

Now, following the global recession of 2008, there is a sense in which globalisation's status has been upgraded, moved from being an expectation to being the rule. The Canadian literary comparativist, Eric Cazdyn, in his book *After Globalisation*, examines the manner in which, from the time of its constitution, the processes of globalisation – cultural exchange and the borderlessness, the ostensible 'end' of the nation state – were, in fact, an illusion or foil to the ubiquity of capitalism, a system which now, in the absence of any opposing social organising principle, seems no longer up for debate (7).

Just as Fredric Jameson had warned about "the becoming economic of the cultural, and the becoming cultural of the economic" (Cultures 60), Cazdyn points out that we ought to think critically about "the globalisation of culture" and the "culture of globalisation", so that the two categories conjoined by the 'of' reveal that "in the first instance [the 'of'] identifies the result of a process (culture has been globalized) and in the second describes a form of belonging to a moment whose character has been determined in advance" (10). Therefore, globalisation, as a discourse, has "come into being and continues to operate today precisely to cover and obscure the system that does exist, namely capitalism" (20). Globality, different to globalisation, is precisely the non-negotiable, almost sacrosanct like geopolitical contemporaneity, which is seen in the matter-of-fact position that globalisation processes have today assumed. This acceptance of globalisation as gospel, its somewhat onto-theological posture and authority, as I will show below, has everything to do with the acceptance of the ontological status of 'world' in accounts of world literature. We can say that globality is the fulfilment of a compulsory globalisation, and the necessarily unavoidable installation of a global political order characterised by capital driven incentives that proceed to universalise, by expanding the flat material and spatial movement of capital beyond national territories. In other words, globalisation can, on the one hand, be ceded to, whereas globality, on the other hand, is the disavowal of such an option to cede.

As far as world literature is concerned, then, while some scholars have chosen to conduct their examinations of African migration in a more or less hermeneutic manner, deploying their analytical skills for close readings of various modes of artistic and political expression such as art, film, music and novels, others have tended to focus more on developing working 'theories', as it were, about this space of cultural production that is a result of territorial displacement, as well as expressive negotiations of cultural citizenship in

globalisation. My reading therefore demonstrates how terms such as 'globalisation' must find their trace in older established notions of citizenry, as well as the ways in which we make sense of the language of globality, or power, individual and collective ontologies, which would give us a foothold on globalisation's turf, allowing us to control and reroute globalisation's preferred narrative of itself as naturally occurring.

This line of reason finds affinities with those in the field of postcolonial studies who insist on an investigation of the Eurocentric epistemologies of world literature.[4] It is also one reason why Stefan Helgesson, when he investigates the place of African and postcolonial writing in the arena of world literature, concludes that "the world of world literature relies for its existence on the contingent desire for literary inventiveness rather than political affirmation" (499). One has to approach postcolonial literature as a constant referent in theorisations of world literature, "given how the work by writers from the colonies and post colonies emerge in the force field between their irreducibly subjective positions and other, internationally more influential fields of literary and academic production" (484). My analysis therefore moves from textual qualities in the writing that aim to rehabilitate African migrant literature from the predicament of 'positionality'. A rather strong articulation of the double bind of African writing is palpable in Helgesson's essay when he points to the strange ways in which postcolonial writers, perhaps more than any others, have had to contend with "the ambiguous logic of literature as a globalised phenomenon" (499). For scholars of world literature mindful of this directive, an insistence on evaluating modes of reading suggests "less of a focus on 'world' and more on the failure of postcolonial studies to read 'literature' on its own terms" (487). My approach, then, intersects with Helgesson's concerns, by considering the (im)possibility of the ethnographic imperative, the 'strategy' of 'strategic essentialism', on a related register: where the ontology of African migrant writing which is constituted by its alterity in the scene of globality.

But to map and give some shape to the theoretical topography of this dissertation, it is incumbent to follow closely the philosophical and theoretical trail in the history of world literature. To do this, one must think in terms of the scandalous moment when world literature, as an institutional practice, begins to empty the concept of 'the world' of its

[4] There are some very strong allegiances with existing scholarship which should be signalled. For a detailed investigation into the overemphasis on migrancy in postcolonial literature, see, for example: Timothy Brennan's *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (1997). About the market value of literary positionality in the world literature scene, Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001) is a classic. Closer to my own objectives that seeks to de-centre the attention to migrancy in these texts would be Sarah Brouillette's *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007).

normativity, substituting its spiritual concerns by centring spatio-materiality and thereby diminishing its world-making potential. Far from being a limiting impediment which closes off the ingenuity of the potential for 'pure' literary criticism, the move I am proposing in fact creates opportunities for the general reader as well as the critic, to *relocate* culture in the phenomenological processes that account both for the desire as well as the actualities of globalisation and globality. Bearing in mind my concerns about the present of globality as constituted by depravation and ruined time, we can assess the capacity of a spatialist account of the world, and its impact on our temporal politics. Certainly, as Cazdyn correctly notes, the fact that we cannot think of an 'after' or 'post' globalisation should signal the extent to which globalisation has become fossilised and rigid, imperviously set in its ways in the present. It is interesting to note the degree to which Francis Fukuyama was lambasted by critics the world over when, in the early 90s, he proposed 'the end of history' in his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). In his treatise, Fukuyama had heralded the *becoming* of a new world order in which all nations concede to democracy *as* capitalism. Today, because of the seeming failure to conceive of a post-globalisation, and because such a term does not exist as a developed concept in theories of political economy, such critics have themselves inadvertently become Fukuyamaist in their submission to the immutable nature of globalisation *as* capitalism (Fisher 7). To the extent that Fukuyama theorises 'the end of history' as that which is driven by a world no longer at odds with respect to structural economic systems, one could well argue that Fukuyama's end of history is the very state of globality about which I am concerned. At any rate, in order to understand the currency of migrant writing, there is benefit in thinking theory "in geopolitical, historical, and genealogical terms, rather than as a network of transcendent and abstract ideas" (Lionnet 16).

The world of spatial mobility and the spirituality of 'world'

In this thesis, I depart from the crucial juncture of 'the world' of world literature, and its relation to globality in terms of the temporal predicament of the present, a present that is constituted by our sense of it as the ruined time of capitalism. We must note the two distinct philosophical approaches to the hotly contested contemporary theories of world literature. At the turn of the millennium, with the debates about cultural pluralism and transnationalism at their zenith, the Marxist Italian literary scholar, Franco Moretti, introduced a radical way of viewing world literature in a popular essay entitled "Conjectures on World Literature". The essay attempts to move us from the practice of analytical approaches to literature, to emphasising the force of world literature as a spatio-geographical entity, best apprehended by

a positivist historical empiricism, which Moretti understands to have been supressed because of the privileged understanding of world literature in the regional, idiosyncratic specificities of the author and her work. But Moretti pushes a dismissive gesture at prevailing methodological approaches to world literature, a no doubt vast and expansive body of work, when he says that "the question is not really *what* we should do – the question is *how*" (45). In order to understand world literature, says Moretti, we cannot simply accumulate a great deal of literature since the voluminous task needs "a new critical method" (46). Of course, with increasing cyber platforms and self-publishing industries that enable the emergence of various types of texts, stories and documents the world over, we can already see how capacious this body of literature has become, more so since Moretti's postulation in the early 2000s. Borrowing from the world systems theories in economic history, Moretti claims that literature in the circuits of global capitalism is "simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*: with a core, and a periphery (and semi-periphery) that are bound together in growing inequality" (Moretti 56). The implication here being that the possibility of world literature is 'one', in the sense that it is a singular world system of literature – *Weltliteratur* – and unequal insofar as it does not reflect the balanced cultural and socio-economic intercourse that the forefathers of world literature, Goethe and Marx, had hoped for (Cheah 46).

And so, employing the work of the American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein as well as Fredric Jameson, Moretti places 'genre' at the centre, the core, of "world-systems", arguing that we ought to adopt a "comparative morphology" which would essentially consider world literature, first and foremost, as an entity in global circulation, contingent on the demarcation of nation-states or territorial boundaries reflected on the world map. The morphology Moretti speaks of exists along the axis of space and time, and can thus give us a perspective of the texts that engage their environment and their regionality. In addition to providing an historiographic account of the particular regional and social climates that give rise to the works, this morphology can offer us another way in which texts can be read in the present moment, understood principally as circulating within the global market of print commodities.

The historical account that would be a necessary dimension to world literature would in essence be a "history of recorded life, a history of the interaction between the local and the global" (Dimock 90), which develops into a theory Moretti calls the "law of literary evolution" (57). With such a genealogy emergent, the evolution of literature will require a method of 'distant reading', which is in clear opposition to "direct textual reading", since one can never fully know the specificities and minutiae of all texts within the world literary

space. The strategy of a distant reading is thus defined:

> Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, is *a condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. (57)

We should want to interrogate Moretti's conception of knowledge and, particularly, the world. The paradigm he introduces can hardly be said to be insignificant, but as it relates to genre, and transnationalism of any sort, the 'world' for Moretti seems a matter of course. This seeming blind-spot, compromised by the weight of statistical data analytics, also appears to be the most critiqued aspect of Moretti's work on digital humanities. For instance, Wai Chee Dimock, a South Asian-American postcolonial theorist, is weary of Moretti's systematising approach, which borders on encyclopaedic finality, always against the grain of literary praxis which seeks to create unstable openings rather than fixed epistemologies. While we must appreciate the value of evidentiary empiricism, Dimock reminds us to play the double bind of local and global, even in thinking such approaches. She hints at the ways this method of understanding literature indicates something of an interpellating force: "I would like, at the same time, to caution against what strikes me as his over-determination to general laws, to global postulates, at some remove from the *phenomenal* world of particular texts" (90 emphasis added). One wonders what can account for the excesses of the text, in terms of that which it expresses beyond its perspective simplicity. With distant reading, it might be said, the amorphous qualities of the world literary text, the space for the unverifiable in the text, the incalculable elements of it, the spiritual impulse needing to be marked, appears narrow.

And still, there are others who have, in a much more animadverted way, distanced themselves from Moretti's 'mapping' approach, despite its seeming enabling possibilities to mitigate, through its emphatic cartographic impulse, the important sociological methodology which has apparently been missing in literary criticism. We can recall Gayatri Spivak's insistence in *Death of a Discipline*, expressed in stronger and no uncertain terms, that such a fixation on empiricism cannot by itself be enough to negotiate the binds of a global literary landscape. For Spivak, the regime of a socio-scientific investment in literary studies does not allow us to learn from the singular nor the unverifiable, since "[t]he world systems theorists

upon whom Moretti relies […] [are] useless for literary study that must depend on texture" (443). In Chapter One, I will investigate the idea that the spiritual impulse of the text is one means by which to account for this texture. For now though, Morizo Ascari, also an Italian literary critic, is critical of the approach too. "What worries me" he laments in his analysis of this methodology and its contingent transnational exchange "is Moretti's tendency to regard distant reading as objective, within the framework of a purportedly scientific approach to the humanities, which might be more aptly described as pseudo-scientific" (2). But perhaps the most thoroughgoing critique of this method comes from Pheng Cheah, who in his book *What is a World?*, zooms in on the temporal dimension of our understanding of 'world' rather than the common perception of the world as a spatial category. The title of Cheah's book itself carries the potency of an onto-phenomenological investigation, the centre of gravity of his analysis is a decidedly ontological question – what is? Given that the prevailing materialist conception of world literature does not adequately account for temporality, Cheah wants to emphasise an alternative notion of world literature, literature whose dynamism consists in "an active power of world making" and because it is temporal and normative, it "contests the world made by capitalist globalisation: that is, world literature is reconceived as a site of processes of worlding and as an agent that participates and intervenes in these processes" (303). Cheah understands the spiritual dimension of world literature to be something immanent to its character, as I do. In the remaining chapters, I will show how our prevailing reading habits have somewhat displaced the spiritual dimension of African literature. Indeed our displacement of the spiritual, the unverifiable, clears the way for the interpolation of the double bind of African migrant writing in globality. As a result, in contemporary theory, there seems to be a disproportionate emphasis on the spatial dimension of 'world' when we think 'world literature'.

So, this 'worldliness' in contemporary literature comes into being, or is at least given credence, at the moment when we conceive of it as "*circulation* in the global market of print commodities" or when we come to think of it as a "*global* system of production" (emphasis added 305). Cheah, reading Goethe, points out that this understanding of world literature is different to the type of 'world' that Goethe had in mind when he first posed the question of world literature. The pressure point of existing theory lies on a materialist account, whereas Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* was not so much interested in a mapping of spatial categories which merely reflect a narrative of human progress, as it was articulating a world to be understood in its temporal dimension, where temporality frames history, especially the history of thought that has produced the world as we know it in any particular epoch.

Indeed, paying attention to this spiritualist and temporal obligation, the humanist ethos of *Weltliteratur* was taken seriously by post-Second World War era thinkers such as Erich Auerbach, picking up the relay stick from Goethe. Auerbach has done much to clarify how for Goethe, the 'causality', the actuality of humanness, can be harnessed by accessing the world's languages and cultures such that forms of consciousness compel us to humanity. Note that being compelled to humanity is already an ethical posture, which literature can help bring about, resonating with Spivak's directive, as I go on to elaborate in Chapter One of this thesis. In this way, Auerbach writes, within "world actuality, history affects us most immediately, stirs us most deeply and compels us most forcibly to a consciousness of ourselves" and as a result, history becomes "the only object in which human beings can step before us in their wholeness. Under the object of history one is to understand not only the past, but the progression of events in general; history therefore includes the present" (qtd. in Cheah 306). If we are concerned about the predicament of the present moment of globality, then the spiritualist account of world literature may have something insightful to contribute to the discussion in terms of unblocking our epistemic modalities. In the case of the African migrant writing in this thesis, we especially see how this spiritualist view of history as past and present is connected to the points of entry that the works allow, such as the spiritual impulses of the text, the elements of the texts that escape articulation.

Guiding us through an understanding of a spiritualist world literature, Auerbach takes care to mention that he is not invoking history in the ordinary sense, but an "inner history" which when understood for its temporal property drives us to the "actualization" of our potentialities (qtd. in Cheah 306). For Cheah, moreover, we can only think 'world literature' in the temporal sense, and it is precisely this quality that makes world literature normative, since it "compels us to see our humanity, and what it shows us moves us to action because it allows us to see that we can actualize our potentialities" (309). So normative a force is this conception of world literature, pumped with a worlding dynamism, that Cheah bravely asserts that "only the study of literary traditions governed by it deserves to be called Weltliteratur" (309). But, as it turns out, this stands in some contradistinction to contemporary theories of world literature, which take the world as merely a spatial entity, understood for its cartographic import. When compared to the normative quality of world literature in the sense invoked by Goethe, the cartographic import of a materialist account appears a somewhat weaker force, it frustrates the resistance to capitalism's violent appropriation of space and time, quite different to the intended normative force of the world first conceptualised by the Enlightenment poet. The world, therefore, cannot only be taken to

mean the extension of the scope and range of production organised by capital. To understand the world simply as the material space upon which transactional intercourse transpires, is to take it as a space in which the circulation and evaluation of world literature is predicated on an always already constituted, indeed overdetermined, mode of production in which capital's world reach is its own impetus and ends. Rather than move us into a space of symmetrical exchange which would release the possibility for a consciousness across temporal lines, this 'locomotive' understanding of literature in mercatorian space is only "the exchange or circulation of an object between subjects, the object's movement across flat spatial distance in time conceived spatially" (307) so that the "inner history of humanity" about which Auerbach is concerned, the temporal dimension of history as the past and present, is completely effaced.

Now, the idea that globalisation ultimately hybridises in its plurality as it moves across the different nations on earth is of course an aporia. If Auerbach understands globalisation as that which flattens and homogenises in a way, the theories espoused by the likes of Moretti see it as having the opposite effect. Cheah's reading, with its deconstructive inflections, will destabilise the notion of plurality in Moretti's position, because the irony is, of course, "that globalisation ushers in the unity required for a world literature", all the while eradicating the "plurality" which, Cheah points out, is "equally requisite to a world literature" (307). If we take the 'locomotive' emphasis behind existing conceptions of world literature, most clearly evidenced by contemporary globalisation theories, we see distinctly the conflation of the 'world' and 'globe' which precludes a reckoning with Goethe's instructive thinking about world literature and what we today think of as transnationalism and globalisation (303). David Damrosch offers such a definition, which I argue points to the preoccupation with the world as a spatial object in which material processes of global circulation appear outsized. For Damrosch, world literature refers to "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (4). Cheah calls our attention to the language and syntax of this definition, the prominence of a spatio-geographical conception which seems to foreclose, or at least limit, the full force of temporality. At any rate, such a definition describes a hermeneutics that comes late to the party, the world is already decided, and literature's role is simply to reflect it. It is as if the function of literatures beyond nation-states is simply for them to move along and within a space and time axis. Yet Damrosch is still a little closer to a view of the spiritual than Moretti is, since the former's approach is not contingent on statistical data and analysis related to the pecuniary aspects of world literature, its fungible character in the world literary marketplace.

Nevertheless, one gets the sense that to proceed simply from Damrosch's directive which underscores spatio-geography, is to risk winnowing out the spiritual impulse. An example of this is his elaboration on the material relation between literature and the world. He writes that "a work enters into world literature by a double process, first, by being read as literature; second by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin" (6). In the second chapter, in which I consider *We Need New Names* and *Voice of America*, we might see how Damrosch's view that literature beyond national border enters *into* a space, there to be distributed, consumed, has some reverberations of the structure of the ethnographic imperative.

I will at this juncture acknowledge my appropriation of this important turn of phrase that captures the situation of African migrant writing. In a blog post defending Tayie Selasi against criticism that *Ghana Must Go* contains several gaps that don't accord with the immigrant experience, the critic and scholar Aaron Bady has written to the effect that the burden of representation placed upon African writing limits its world making potential: "True art suffers because of the ethnographic imperative" (Bady para 5). This formulation has remained with me, since it converges with my suspicions about the structure of the double bind of African migrant writing, and the ways it interrupts authorial and readerly protocols. As a result, this thesis seeks to develop and inject theoretical rigour to the idea of an ethnographic imperative, proposing it as a concept that is useful in understanding the interpellation of African writing as well as it indissociable double bind.

Adopting a more elaborate deployment of the sociological theories that Moretti infuses into his literary practice, Pascale Casanova, in *The World Republic of Letters*, is adamant that the literary positing that we undertake cannot merely "geographically enlarge the corpus of works needing to be studied, or to import economic theories of globalization into the literary universe – still less to provide an impossibly exhaustive enumeration of the whole of literary production" because this should, in any case, never be the point. Instead of a world literature Casanova speaks of an "international literary space, or else of a world republic of letters" different from world literature in that the works are not simply a contemporary reflection of the world of literature, but carry with them a historical origin too, a sociality that determines the value of literature (xxiii).

Furthermore, Casanova tries to show that "the great writers have managed, by gradually detaching themselves from historical and literary forces, to invent their literary freedom, which is to say *the conditions of the autonomy* of their work" (emphasis added xxiii). It is clear that for Casanova the conditions under which a writer is expected to produce

'good' art do not allow for the presence of something like the ethnographic imperative. Yet, how might we account for Bulawayo's novel, for which the abstract space of a literary freedom seems to mean not only 'freedom *from*' socio-political constraints, but rather, freedom *to* write about whatever she wishes, with no strings attached to aesthetic covenants and obligations that expect experimentation at the level of form. As we will see in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, this is the same question that faces the writers who hear the call, and choose to divert it back to the Other who issues it, by asking about the very status of African literature, and by implication, 'the world' of its existence. I will therefore show, in the second chapter, the extent to which both Bulawayo and Osondu's writing, creative works that field the call of the ethnographic imperative in the name of urgency, attempt to work through the double binds that an attuning to such urgency imposes upon them.

Casanova points out that, for decades now, writers across the globe have been at pains to dissociate themselves from constricting aspects of artistic production, cautious of the structural interpellation that pushes them to 'invent" literary freedom', from a non-national and non-affiliational space. In the process of shaking off the compromising contingencies of national politics, or the ethnographic imperative, they negate their 'difference' in favour of an assimilation of "the values of one of the great literary centres". For Casanova, the works produced from such a notional space, the world republic of letters, can be rewarded quite handsomely for their de-nationalising techniques, and for seeking refuge in the unfettered world of literary sovereignty, which is said to be better precisely because it is a purportedly autonomous universal literary valuing community. We might see how this operates in Cole's *Open City*, for instance, the deflected call that sees the author comfortably toying with aesthetic cosmopolitanism, only to show it up as a conduit of rogue capitalism, determined to mystify understandings of temporal politics. Or in Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, which works out its problems with the ethnographic imperative by posing its moral and philosophical question through trauma, memory and the complex formation of migrant subjecthood in globality. If Selasi's novel appears at first glance to be forcibly yoked to the exigencies of Afropolitanism, the text, if approached with an ethical politics of reading, points us to its own undoing in that respect. Yet, Casanova's idea of a notional world of letters cannot quite account for the aberration that a text such as *We Need New Names* presents, because there we are dealing with the value, indeed the embrace, of cultural and political difference. Whereas, in the notional world of letters, transnational writers aspire to transcend these points of differentiation, overcome the contingencies of the national and become valued for doing so. Although hers is also a sociological account, Casanova aims to address "a complex

transnational web" of literature which exceeds nation-state boundaries in a way that is perhaps more pointed than Moretti's, by outlining how the world literary space is characterised by aesthetic cultural capital, and consequently, how the power relations that govern the circulation of literary texts are predicated on an uneven scale of political power in the centre and periphery, similarly to the ways in which the global political economy is said to be characterised by an uneven distribution of capital. Hence, our valuing communities, the very impulses that allow us to adjudicate literary production, is mediated by the cultural capital of the writers, their subject matter and the space within which their works circulate.

However, Cheah would dial this argument back a little, rerouting the discussion back to the inherent task of a literary reading the world-making energy of world literature that entails a demystification of capital's aura, its sustained molestation of the imagination. Cheah avers that contemporary theory's emphasis on spatial mobility, despite the Marxist base from which it proceeds, obscures the temporal force of world literature that is imminent even in Marx's understanding of the world. In the process, this notion neglects the fact that for Marx:

> circulation is "normative" because its dynamism is temporal. It is not merely movement across borders but the circulation of blood throughout the entirety of the world qua body, the motility of the organism. Where the world (social relations) is no longer an external power that stands outside and restricts the production process but has become united with it, the world is no longer spatial. It becomes temporalized and alive. (*What is a World* 73)

What it means for the world to become temporalized, to take on a spiritual rather than merely spatial character, is that the producers or society within the system undergo an epistemic rearrangement, since they can now think of themselves, not as victims of capitalism's march towards destinal progress, but as agents of production. This can only occur if the world is understood not only as the terrain upon which capital moves but as something whose vitality and force empowers at an extra-terrestrial level, where the producers can see themselves as agential vis-à-vis the future of the world. I will elaborate on the implications of the materialist account of the world by thinking through David Scott's concern about the present as a moment in which we are stuck in ruined time, and in which the imagination seems unable to operate outside the conscripts of capitalism. Given this position of being stranded in the present, an attention to the spiritualist conception of 'world' might be one response to the predicament of the political unconscious, the social blockage in contemporary global

capitalism. There seems to be an opening up of all sorts of golden opportunities with Cheah's conception of world literature. In a utopian sense:

> The production process, which capitalism alienated from producers, no longer appears as something that stands outside the producers but is recognized as amenable to their control in the same way that external nature is demystified and appropriated in productive activity. The becoming-world of the production process is also the self-actualisation of the society of producers in and as the world (73).

For the futurity of a temporal politics that can regulate capital's appropriation of time, there is no longer an 'end' to history, since history is at once released from the intense grip of global capital, the triumph of modernity as progress and development. We will see in Chapter One how the materialist understanding of 'world' in world literature frustrates our reckoning with globality, the sense of being stranded in the present sociality. In fact, the very idea of a present mode of sociality that is constituted by ruined time and stagnation places us squarely in the epistemically violent district about which Marx warns us. Marx writes that "because a form of production that does not correspond to the capitalist mode of production can be subsumed under its forms of revenue […] the illusion that capitalist relationships are the natural condition of any mode of production is further reinforced" (qtd. in Spivak, *AE* 99). In its best configuration, world literature, and African migrant writing specifically, seems to me to have within it the power to activate the imagination towards our sense of the present, to the extent that it exposes the conditions of its own possibility, which it cannot escape. Indeed, the spiritualist account of world literature enables us to consider, for instance, Benjamin's sense of the vanishing present, and how this might enhance our imaginative procedures as we encounter the protected power of global capitalism. In his "Thesis on the Philosophy of History", Benjamin writes that:

> The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant of its recognisability, never to be seen again […] History is the object of a construction, whose site forms not with homogenous empty time, but time filled with the presence of now-time [*von Jetztzeit erfüllte*].[5] (*Illuminations* 165)

[5] Translation modified. Benjamin speaks of '*Jetztzeit*', which he places in inverted commas to clearly indicate that he is not simply referring to the present – '*Gegenwart*'. He is not using the term in the sense that other German philosophers such as Heidegger or Nietzsche did, to mean a contemporary moment whose actions have no regard for the past or the future. With a different valence, now-time for Benjamin is the present ready to spring into revolution, it is the response to the present moment *as* crisis, which will not be mitigated by

For Benjamin, now-time is time made up of vitality, it is potentiated and active, it is, as with the spiritualist conception of world, poised towards the future. It is therefore possible to put this view of the vanishing present in conversation with Auberach's articulation of an inner history, to speculate generally about something we could call 'the philosophy of an inner history'. This necessarily means that its temporal dimension includes the present, which is also the past, open to an unverifiable future, quite apart from the spatio-material approaches to the world and even farther from the 'end of history' postulations that reify capital's appropriation of time, where time is suffered as homogenous and empty. Such an understanding of world would enable us to come to terms with, as Spivak mentions elsewhere, "[t[he gift of time grasped as our unanticipatable present, as a moment of living as well as dying, of being hailed by the other as well as the distancing of that call" (*AE* 104). On the subject of the call, as I will show in Chapter One, the writerly demands come in the form of a call by the ethnographic imperative, whose very presence produces the situation of the double bind of African migrant writing. In such a condition, "we find ourselves in the subject position of determinate decisions, both right (or both wrong), one of which cancels the other, we are in a aporia which by definition cannot be crossed, or a double bind" (105). I wish to emphasise the point about the undecidability of the double bind of African migrant writing, its unsolvability if will, which can only be described as an experience, not a mere contradiction or antinomy.

Under these circumstances, this thesis relies on a critical appropriation which must, finally, be given its prime theoretical buoyancy and energy. The concept of a double bind was first introduced by the English philosopher and psychiatrist Gregory Bateson who, in an attempt to develop a critical vocabulary that could account for childhood schizophrenia, used the term qualitatively to refer to moments when the child would experience cognitive dissonances, the enabling condition of a double bind. Published in 1971, his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, is attentive to the fact that "both those *whose life is enriched* by trans-contextual gifts, and those who are impoverished by transcontextual confusions are alike in one respect: for them there is always or often a 'double-take' " (191 emphasis added). Bateson, here, notes a moment in which the subject is forever imbricated in the double bind, which he defines as the moment, no matter what she does, the subject cannot win (161). From

messianic hope, but by reconceptualising our sense of temporality and time. Also, other versions have translated this concept as 'the time of the now' or 'here and now', for instance. Whichever English formula one choses, of importance is that Benjamin juxtaposes now-time with the homogenous empty time of the capitalist ruling class, which cannot take a leap into the future. In Chapter one, I will expound on the notion of the present moment, by thinking through postcolonial temporality and the imagination.

the perspective of psychology, we can consider the extended example of the double bind offered by Bateson's delineation of this position in which there are two injunctions. The first injunction requires one to perform a particular task, while the second and more 'abstract' belies the very first injunction. Bateson's definition can be appropriated for the contemporary moment. Because I am arguing that the double bind is an experience at a psychic level, a useful mode by which to grapple with the theoretical dimensions of this experience is through a psychoanalytic device. What Derrida would later call an aporia of ethical relation, Bateson had called a double bind, and undertook to figure the mechanics of this position of undecidablity.[6] Thus, the recognition and the negotiation of a double bind presents itself as one instructive mode by which to grapple with the theoretical dimensions of this writerly positionality and the responses to the calls issued by the ethnographic imperative.

A final signpost before attending to the nuts and bolts of the writing. Notwithstanding what is ultimately a technical psychoanalytic definition of the double bind in Bateson, my argument does not rest on the idea that the texts offer a figuration of such a double bind as such. There are indeed some instances that are exemplary of a figuration of the double bind in the texts, the double bind between the local and the global in Bulawayo, between modernity and tradition in Osondu, between the singular and the universal in Selasi or Mengestu and so forth. It is true, also, that it would be more appropriate, but only strictly speaking, to think in terms of the double bind*s* of African migrant writing, a multiplicity of structural aporiras in both the textual sense as well as the sense of authorial positionality, a more global or economic sense of the double bind. And since I am trying to follow the track of an impulse rather than deploy the term only as a distinct and functional analytical apparatus, the term double bind is used provisionally at times to get at these moments of the elusive trace of alterity within and outside the text, the trace of that which appears in its absence, yet is always already there at the moment we invoke 'African migrant writing'.

For that reason, what I find in all my writers is merely that their texts offer a *staging*

[6] Always travelling on the terrain of the *impossible*, Bateson's example of the double bind is classically psychoanalytical. For him, the double bind "results in placing the child in a position where, if he responds to his mother's simulated affection [the injunction to do as instructed], her anxiety will be aroused and she will punish him (or insist, to protect herself, that his overtures are simulated, thus confusing him about the nature of his own messages) to defend herself from closeness with him. Thus the child is blocked off from intimate and secure associations with his mother. However, if he does not make overtures of affection, she will feel that this means she is not a loving mother and her anxiety will be aroused. Therefore, she will either punish him for with-drawing or make overtures toward the child to insist that he demonstrate that he loves her. If he then responds and shows her affection, she will not only feel endangered again, but she may resent the fact that she had to force him to respond" (168).

at the scene of reading where imaginative potential can be harnessed. In refusing interpellation, refusing in other words to be *about* something determined in advance, the works offer an opportunity to activate the imagination, and they do so by insisting that their meaning, pre-comprehended by the proper name 'African' writing or 'African diasporic' literature in the event of reading, is in excess of any writerly intentionality or readerly expectation. If the texts are a staging, not necessarily a figuration, of these various double binds, I argue that it is our responsibility to recognise them as such, to arrest that staging in the event of reading, and to allow it to become something like the experience of the impossible, allowing the texts the right to their opacity. Thus it is that there is something of a critical reading posture in aiming for a reading that is mindful of the negotiations of the ethnographic imperative.

In the last instance, I should also signal that the somewhat multi operational use of the term double bind in the dissertation, which is itself in excess of the Bateson definition, employed with all the contingencies that come with an analytical frame that aims for "a reading that produces rather than protects" (Spivak, *OG* lxxv). As a descriptive tool throughout the dissertation, the double bind finds itself in a situation in which, as a single term, and "by virtue of being *one* word [/term] is made to sometimes work in one way and sometimes in another and thus is made to point away from the absence of a unified meaning" (lxxv). It is in this spirit that I am deploying the term double bind so that it operates on multiple registers, in at times technical a manner, while at other times more contextual.

The term spiritual impulse takes on a similar deployment throughout the thesis, working as substitute for analogous terms that suggest an interpretation of textuality beyond the evidentiary, such as opacity, which by necessity aims for those components of the texts which are present in their absence. In some places, I use the term 'spiritual impulse' of the text to catch at a term that targets the interpretive gap between sign and meaning, disrupting the certainty of guaranteed signification in the text. Therefore, I am thinking with other similar concepts, so that the relation between what I call the spiritual impulse of the text, and other heuristic modalities such as Benjamin's 'expressionless' and Glissant's 'opacity' seems to be continuous and porous. Thus, I employ the terms 'spiritual' to get at these unstated traces in the text, whether thematic or formal.

My reason for doing this throughout the dissertation is not only to catalogue similar analytic devices, but also to develop a critical vocabulary that can articulate those aspects of the African migrant texts I am analysing, those that attempt to play the double-bind that conditions their very conception. I thus have to emphasise that 'spiritual impulse' is in the

tradition of a reading practice that focuses on what is within the text and the context in which it is received and defined. At the same time as it exceeds this context, the text makes something more than itself. One could also come at this by another Benjaminian concept of the aura in the work of art,[7] or Roland Barthes' notion of the 'punctum', that which punctures what he terms the 'studium', which is what I know by virtue of acculturation. Writing about the potential of photography to communicate events, Barthes introduces the concept of the punctum, to challenge the obvious and symbolic meaning of the photograph. The 'punctum' is both inside the image and shatters it, and in turn affects the viewer (*Camera Lucida*, 1980). The spiritual impulse of the text facilitating imaginative potential? Perhaps.

It is precisely because of something akin to the spiritual impulse of the text that, discussing his film on the late Caribbean poet-philosopher's theory of relationality, Manthia Daiwara mentions the strong criticism of what he called "the transparency of the cinematic image" which employed a certain "systematic and dogmatic stitching together of shots to make meaning (para 16). Instead, for Glissant, a good story or film is one in which "what was left outside of the frame was as important as what was revealed. Good films for him were those that self-consciously played with showing as a form of disguising, those that reveal by deferring meaning as if to show that by giving an identity they were deliberately hiding its otherness" (para. 16).

Having provided some of the ground work on 'globality' and 'double bind', I go on to build upon them in the next chapter. The dissertation is organised as follows: In Chapter One, "Temporal dimensions of Globality, Imagination and World Making Potential of African Migrant Writing," I consider the conditions of possibility for African writing under the predicates of the ethnographic imperative. This situation plays itself out in the very structural positionality of the writing. The works reflect the authors' strategies in negotiating the double bind. I argue that if we read them for their spiritual impulses rather than through predetermined modalities, the works perform a type of world making gesture. They compel us at the level of the imagination to reflect on human sociality in the wilderness of globality, the wasteland of late capitalist production. To be sure, they help us to understand the specific ways in which the present, suffered as homogenous and empty time, as the ruined time of late capitalism, is continuous with the painful histories of individual and collective subjecthood. The chapter is meant to be explorative rather than analytical. I put several thinkers into conversation with one another, to track and work through the iterations of the ontological

[7] See. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1935.

status of globality, focusing on its temporal politics. I argue that the world made by capitalist globalisation precludes us from understanding the truth of the spiritualist account of the world, which is this: 'the world is made, not given' (Helgesson &Vermeulen 10). In fact, as our present moment suggests, the world is made specifically by political action in and through time. Accordingly, one of the key problems I explore in this dissertation is that of temporality and its relation to the production of the field of African literature, and the responses that this literature stages to the modality of stagnancy under which we are trapped. I draw on the significant work of David Scott who suggests that the protocols of the world can be grasped through an assessment of the temporal uncertainty and insecurity of the present, of a world ruined by capitalist globalisation's decimation of the political imagination. As my last move, I draw on Spivak's work on instrumentalising an aesthetic education in order to train the imagination in ethical epistemological performance. I elaborate the operation of an ethical politics of reading, paying attention to the character of what I call the spiritual impulses of the text. It will be clear that a reading for the spirit of the works engages the imagination in a way that can release the world making potential of this writing.

In Chapter Two, "Globality, minimalist writing and the shadow of interiority in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and E.C. Osondu's *Voice of America*" I look at the poetics of form and narrative strategies of the two authors who have been called by the ethnographic imperative in the form of the question, 'do you consider yourself an African writer?' An African writer as opposed to what? We might ask. Both these authors intuit that this question is never an innocent one, because it demands that the writer pick a side in a constructed plane between 'theme' and 'form'; to take up a position on a temporal plane, from which their writing will be received with varying expectations depending on the answer. Yet, believing that they nevertheless have an ethical responsibility to represent their continent and countries, they answer the call in the affirmative, and therefore have to proceed to write in such a way that their answer, their attachment to the floating signifier 'African writer', does not program their artistic procedures. Consider the following scenario, that demonstrates the weight of the hegemonic gaze that calls Bulawayo into being, and that demands that she gives an account of herself along predetermined lines. By this point, the interviewer has already asked her whether *We Need New Names* is "strongly autobiographical" and whether the "pale language" and the "use of stereotypes and clichés […] naturally leads to the question: "Are you a Zimbabwean, an African or an American author?" (Peschel para. 6). Bulawayo's response:

> I'm a Zimbabwean author, and by extension I'm an African. So that makes me an African author, just like I'm an African woman. But of course we have to add that Africa is a big monster of space. It's not singular in any way. So as much as we claim some of these identities, they are also not small. When I think about those identities, especially as somebody who is writing outside, *I'm thinking in terms of representation*, in terms of how important it is for the young generation of would-be writers, the ones who are going to be writers in the next 10, 15 years, to face the fates like mine in a space that has been dominated by other races and other cultures. That's why I'm quite comfortable claiming those identities. (emphasis added para. 7)

This chapter works to find moments in the novel when such a double bind is expressed and worked through. I proceed from Mark McGurl's work on the rise of creative writing programmes in the U.S., of which both authors are graduates, to suggest that the double bind is also in the very idea of "systematic creativity" cultivated in such spaces, which are themselves facets of the world literary production. What happens when the writer does not 'transcend' the national, and choses instead to negotiate this double bind by not pretending to ignore it?

This complementary reading of Bulawayo and Osondu's writing, a Zimbabwean and a Nigerian author respectively, appears first, since they both reflect several similarities in their emergence onto the scene and in the reception of their work. *Voice of America* is, of course, a collection of short stories that depict subaltern suffering, mainly in Africa, but also in the U.S. Indeed, the urgency of the writing has something to do with the potentialities of the short story form, and it is this urgency that makes the two books complementary. Yet, because of its un-sequential organisation, *We Need New Names*, which also developed out of an award-winning short story, can in effect be approached as a collection of short stories arranged in such a way as to offer a novel form narrative.

Both authors also respond to a call about some or other 'urgency' of the socio-political situation, as observed in Bulawayo's response above about representation. This call often means, as they both concede, that their narrative strategies take on something of an urgent minimalism that communicates the politics of their countries and the suffering attendant with migration. It is important to understand how the word minimalist is employed throughout the chapter. Rather than the theoretical component of the word, I am strictly interested in its descriptive potential, to mean simply a writing modality that, by necessity, keeps interiority at arm's length because of its investment in the macro, the socio-political

obligation, which reduces the extent to which the author can attend to the interior. This minimalist strategy, as employed by these two texts, up sizes, zooms out as in a panoramic, and remains open to the socio-political in a way that refrains from touching the micrological dispositions of subjecthood. Both these authors are inclined to the child narrator, and both have been praised by the Caine Prize for their narrative strategy. In the last instance, I consider the scene of globality that both Bulawayo and Osondu reflect.

The temporality of deep racial time finds its articulation in Mengestu's novel, which is the subject of Chapter Three, "Stranded in Globality: Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*." Here, I begin by reflecting on two popular reviews of the novel which are an example of a moment in which we expect the novel to function as the prototypical experience of migration, where the inclination might be to read the novel through a predetermined set of criteria. While these concerns about cultural pluralism and identity are undoubtedly urgent, the novel also has much to say about the static blockage in time, globalisation as time out of joint, as it works through memory, trauma and loss, all of which are inflected with a melancholic tenor that is a result of the protagonist's resignation to the changing environment around him, namely, the gentrification of his neighbourhood. I therefore begin with a rhetorical reading of W.E.B. Du Bois in order to explore the grounding of identity, race, and class in America, recalling how the subalternisation of minority groups is tied to a longer history of capitalism that dissolves the welfare state, as Du Bois points out, and creates a kind of racial time that constitutes two different experiences of the present. To the extent that the novel exposes the dark side of globality, the sense of time as stalled, depicted in the quotidian life of an Ethiopian migrant in DC, Mengestu's novel shows up globalisation for its brutish side effects, and stages a commentary on the ghostly figure of the past, living on in the present. Accordingly, I hope to index the ways in which Mengestu's novel, in the spirit of Du Bois, offers us a synthesised understanding of race and class, and in the process, demonstrates the way in which black writing does not simply describe things from the world of *objects* from which the text emerges, but also has an iterative function that is actionable at the same time as it describes phenomena. The novel thus becomes a speech-act of the configuration of globality. By inscribing an elusive spiritual dimension in subtle ways, the novel suggests a tense response to the ethnographic imperative, and thus a negotiation of the double bind of African migrant writing.

My reading in this chapter aims to account for the narrator's melancholia in what is otherwise expected to be his diasporic position of opportunity and access to the infrastructures of the state. This is why, when he repurposes the term capitalist realism,

taking it to mean "a deeper, far more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility" Mark Fisher gives us a way to make sense of the privatisation of melancholia that arises not as a natural phenomenon, but as a political category (7-19). Taking Fisher's directive, this chapter prefigures the deadlock in global capitalism as the backdrop of the novel, which enables us to see the dysfunctional system of capitalism as attended by huge costs at the expense of the political imagination.

In Chapter Four "Reading Globality in Tayie Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*," I zoom in on the psychic districts of two characters, the father and protagonist, Kweku Sai, whose character has been over written as to constitute the first ninety pages of the book, and the mother Fola, whose interiority is sustained throughout the novel. This type of interiority, different to the 'minimalist' style of Bulawayo and Osondu, for instance, suggests another strategy to immobilise the ethnographic imperative. In this chapter, I go in search of the spirit of the novel, attempting to mobilise the ethical politics of reading not to find the 'meaning', but the spirit of Selasi's novel which is layered, accented by the poetics and politics of form pertaining to its deflection of the call. The novel presents us with a middle-class family in the U.S., tethered to an ultimately destructive notion of the American Dream, and striving in the direction of "a thing being built: *A Successful Family*" (118) with children who are all "degree-getting, grant winning, good-doing androids, a picture of perfection, New Immigrant Perfection" (127). Selasi is not interested in the ethnographic imperative that determines the boundaries of sociality and that presupposes what can be deemed topical, or rather, she interested in it to extent that she wishes to challenge its authority. For *Ghana Must Go* is bold and celebratory, with middle classed cosmopolitans, moving between Africa and Euro-America. She questions the very category 'African writing', and attempts to 'free' herself from the burden of representation.

Also, in Chapter Four, it becomes clear that Selasi sees her writing of the novel, in both the style and content, to be a rejection of the call from the ethnographic imperative that demands answers about a laundry list of concerns about migrant subjecthood, for instance. Consistently rejecting the mastership of interpellation, she interrogates the pseudo-ontological status that Reed argues stands to be questioned in our discussions of black writing and poetics. To that extent, I explore Selasi's narrative strategy in this chapter, paying careful attention to recurring motifs that hint not only at the spatial materiality in the lives that frame the characters in the novel, but also at the more temporal and psychic dimension, bringing to focus the relation of the past as living on in the present. Active in her deflection of the call, Selasi endeavours to contest the homogenising purview of the very category African

Writing', and the limitations it imposes on the creative landscape available for the African migrant writer. One example of this active protest is to be found in her essay, "Stop Pigeonholing African Writers", in which the author engages directly with the concerns about the incursion of the call by the ethnographic imperative, as she outlines the limitations of the reading practices that are commonly applied to African migrant writing, lamenting the "fondness for these little ethnic trends" (para. 2). Selasi questions, "does the commercial category function as a creative one as well?" The essence of this question, directly linked to normative conceptions of the world, is a useful way of understanding my effort in this chapter.

Finally, in Chapter Five, "Globality, History and Memory in Teju Cole's *Open City*" I consider the narrative techniques the author uses to excavate the implications of memory, past and present, through an analysis of the melancholic intensities of the novel. Julius, the narrator protagonist, is a cosmopolitan figure par excellence, yet there is a melancholic tenor which interrupts any attempts that he makes at genuine connection with others (Vermeulen 42). This circuitous relapse into estrangement in the novel, I argue, exposes the limits of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, and demands, therefore, the supplement of a reading alongside the market (42). This chapter relies on Pieter Vermeulen's work, which also marshals an ethical politics of reading alongside the market. Cole's novel is an outstanding example of the negotiation of the double bind, and, incidentally, he too is hesitant to embrace the idea of 'African writing' as a category. Refusing interpellation is important for Cole. Nonetheless, the ethnographic imperative is present even in the most eminent reviews. Consider the following as a way of opening the question of the double bind. One reviewer, praising the novel in *The Guardian*, concludes that:

> How to read *Open City* is obliquely signalled by these pretentious pratfalls. In the notes of the trumpet of another Chinese band, Julius hears the "spiritual cousins of the offstage clarion in Mahler's Second Symphony". I'm not a musician, but I suspect that's twaddle. But when he hears, in the same tune, the "simple sincerity of songs I had last sung in the school yard of the Nigerian Military School", and is returned, trembling, to a state of childhood innocence, the observation has the force of something genuine. The little emotional space to which no one else in the city is likely to have access is much more important than the public-facing attitudes of the cultural dandy. (Foden para. 17)

Although the review correctly intuits Cole's project of showing up global capitalism for its predatory ways, this remains an instant of the autobiographical brought in to add an expected authenticity. I will show how Cole rather skilfully negotiates such reverberations by using a protagonist who, by virtue of his detached erudition, is able to facilitate his project of exposing globalisation's preferred narrative of itself in subtle and interesting ways. A reading alongside the market reveals how the novel brings together idioms that gesture towards Cole's overarching concern with historical memory in *Open City*, the dis-remembered parts of history that have an invisible yet palpable continuance in the present, the present of global capitalism. Taken together, then, these texts index various negotiations of the double bind, and the ethnographic imperative that comes with it. To the extent that they circulate within globalisation and world literature, they are all called upon to fulfil expectations about writing coming from the continent. Finally, a reading in search of the spirit of the novels will align itself with the power of the spiritual dimension of world, rather than merely the spatialist account of the world, which take globality as given, and which takes the basis of geopolitical configurations as the point from which to issue an ethnographic imperative. By attending to the scene of globality, writing which can negotiate this at the level of style or content, we can say, stages a powerful negotiation of the double bind of African migrant writing

Chapter One

Temporal Dimensions of Globality and Imaginative Potential in African Migrant Writing

> Capital's universalizing power is not merely in the erosion of spatial barriers by the world market but a global mode of production that *destroys space with time*, where the time taken to traverse the space opened up by the world market's breaching of territorial barriers must be reduced to nothing.
>
> --- Pheng Cheah, *What is a World?*

> We demand the right to opacity for everyone.
>
> --- Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

The Conditions of (Im)Possibility

In this chapter, I argue that the spiritual impulse of the selected African migrant writing in this thesis is symptomatic of the temporal politics of globality. This allows me to proceed with my analysis of contemporary African migrant writing from the perspective of temporality, but in a particularly diagnostic manner, tracking various scholarly arguments to do with capitalism's decimation of the collective imagination. If the selected contemporary African writing in this thesis cannot escape the domain of the political unconscious, then I am all the more interested in the potential that my textual corpus has to intervene in the work of the imagination that is decimated by global capitalism. By deploying something of an opacity, either in thematic content or in stylistic devices, the writing in this thesis registers 'a genuine political concern,' insofar as its dynamism and world making potential can be wrenched from the limitations of literary and social transparency. I will go on to argue for just this point in Chapter Two, which considers the case of *We Need New Names* and *Voice of America.* If, for instance, the dispositional dimensions of life interact with some of the more juridical predispositions of the state, then there is a sense in which the very thematic content of the writing rather than its stylistic devices alone, is opaque. That is to say, the very topicality of the writing is spiritual. If Osondu and Bulawayo are more directly engaged in their response to the ethnographic imperative, which seems to limit their stylistic movements in certain ways, the topicality of their writing nevertheless invites a reading that is not simply transparent. My point here is to come at contemporary African migrant writing along the

framework of the temporal politics of globality, whose iterations are everywhere present in the texts, but in elusive ways, in the spiritual texture of the writing. My argument, therefore, is that this spiritual impulse can only be fully be explicated if we interrupt the supposed transparency that such a category as 'African writing' appears to levy on these works.[8] My aim in this chapter is to establish a conceptual meeting place where African migrant writing congregates based on its spiritual dynamism, which I argue yields interesting provocations about the responses to globality that African migrant writing stages.

If the call of the ethnographic imperative demands of the writing something like transparency, as if the work is expected to be known in advance of itself, then such writing would be found on Édouard Glissant's hit list of art that is to be admonished for not actively being anti-reductionist in its posture, for relying on the given transparency of the world, which has a significantly reduced world making potential. This is because transparency narrows the space of the imagination. Glissant often levelled this criticism against certain modes of diasporic writing. For him, diasporic writing that accedes to the ethnographic imperative by not insisting on opacity, misses an opportunity to be overtly anti-reductionist, since opacity is a way of safeguarding individuality and demobilising the tyranny of Truth which would have us believe that globalisation makes the world (Glissant 193). At a certain level, then, the notion of opacity exemplifies the horizon of my core theoretical and conceptual questions in *Globality: The Double Bind of African Migrant Writing*. Part of my effort, here, is to take contemporary African migrant writing as an analogue to investigate the spiritual and temporal dimensions of globality, as well as the conditions of possibility for contemporary African migrant writing.

I approach selected contemporary works through an ethical politics of reading that attends to migrant literature's posture towards the politics of temporality and class-sensitivity. I am, however, not concerned with African migrant writing as simply yet another commodity on the track list of the neoliberal scoresheet. Rather, I attempt to emphasise how this writing can express concerns not only about the difficulties of transmigration and "identity politics", but also about the very economic system that produces the writing as 'African migrant writing'. To that extent, I am concerned with this literature's treatment of globalisation as a neoliberal capitalist mode of production that frustrates alternative visions of

[8] It might be argued that this very ethical politics of reading alongside the market that I am proposing is itself capable of reducing the opacity of these texts to plain transparency. Accordingly, it is necessary to stress that this is only one possible reading among many others, yet it can only exist if we permit the writing its right to opacity.

individual and collective subject formation. Through a discussion of the spiritualist account of world literature, I locate the works' significance, its worldly causality, not merely in the literary works as objects that move across mercantile space, or as literature that traverses the earthly, natural, flat material entity called the 'globe', understood only in spatial terms.

More important, this literature's worldly causality is to be found in those textual moments when it calls into question the very organising philosophy, the temporal force, of our era of globalisation. So, to recapitulate, the thesis focuses on the structural ambiguity of migration, finding echoes of it in the selected writing. I establish a spectrum on which some texts are mostly operative at a thematic level, where the macro-social commentary that is to be found, however important it ultimately is, seems anchored by narrative strategies of spatio-geographical exteriority which overshadows the particularity and specificity of individual subjecthood. At the same time, the narrative strategies of Mengestu, Selasi and Cole hint at the potentialities of an almost efficacious negotiation of the double bind, if we hasten to add that the double bind, being an aporetic experience, cannot be solved or avoided. These texts seem more patently engaged in a kind of intimate abstraction, inviting us into the minds of the subjects about whom we read, and requiring readers to explore the *specificity* of their complex and mystifying fields. In this way, these texts seem to be answering a call for the capaciousness of African migrant writing in content and form, where the challenge is to render art that is not eclipsed by the demands of group representation or the ethnographic imperative within the realm of world literature.

Related to that, this chapter in particular offers an analysis of the structural interpellation that forces writers to negotiate what I call the double bind of African migrant writing, two contradictory injunctions issued at the same time. This double bind, between the market's demand for the ethnographic imperative (or something like (un)strategic ethnification) and the framing of the linguistic operation of globality as cultural globalization, may prove instructive for our approach to African migrant writing. True to the structure of a double bind, African migrant writers cannot 'solve' or escape the double bind of their positionality, they can only negotiate it. Thus, an important point of departure has been to highlight the discursive difference between, on the one hand, globalisation (the globalising protocols, processes and effects) and on the other hand, globality (the end state of globalisation). The discursive value of the term globality, it is worth repeating, lies in its simultaneous difference and sameness from the term globalisation – it mobilises a dialectic analogous to the one at play when we think of different but complementary entities such as race and colour, sex and gender, class and poverty, citizen and nationality and so forth, now,

globality and globalisation. In other words, the relation between globality and globalisation seems to inhabit a continuous space where globalisation stands for the processes and modes by which the ideological project of global markets, immigration and transcultural movement on a global scale operates to conceal the force of capitalism, so that we think of globalisation as a quasi-natural phenomenon about which little can be done. Even where the thesis seems to use the terms interchangeably, implicitly, it is the theoretical edifice, the abstract infrastructure of a borderless capital, that bears upon my usage.

In the end, I offer a provocation about the relationship between authorial positionality and the literary techniques demonstrated by the texts, all of which move within the circuits of 'world literature'. For these African migrant writers interpellated in the domain of the world literary marketplace, there is a discernible worldly causality that seems to have exceeded their enunciatory modality. In a way, the novels can be understood to gesture towards a concern with a conception of the world beyond its merely spatial dimension, which would assume that globalisation creates a world. Because of this, I am interested in the more spiritual dimension of their narratives, more abstract than the concrete, visible presence of globalisation's physiognomy and physical border crossings. Finally, I hope to contribute to scholarly debates about the ontological status of world literature by demonstrating how prevailing literary approaches to African migrant writing will need to be supplemented by an ethical politics of reading, one that centres the status of globality. With such a reading practice, we may arrive at a new enunciatory register that captures the ontology of transnationalism beyond merely the anthropologies of 'the immigrant experience' of displacement or unbelonging and a critique of Euro-Americanism, so that the texts complicate our relationship to global capital at the same time as they throw the chaos of globality, and global capitalism, into sharp relief.

The imaginative potentiality of African migrant writing

What relation does contemporary African migrant writing have to the temporal politics of globality? This section will explore some possible rejoinders to this question. I have placed it here to avoid veering into a conceptual cul-de-sac when discussing African migrant writing, since the scope of world literature is not only the body of work that, for better or worse, we name 'world literature.' As I have shown in the Introduction, in some respects, world literature entails the very reading habits that we bring to the texts, and it can be understood as the practices, or the "set of disciplinary protocols and institutional contexts," that these texts seem to bring into being (Helgesson &Vermeulen 3). The textual corpus in this thesis

petitions the allegorical eye of the reader, for it illuminates the extent to which it is also our own reading practices, rather than the textuality of world literature alone, that have become subsumed by certain "ways of reading, especially those that seek to close or predetermine the direction" of such migrant writing (Reed 6). This surely has implications for our readerly *imagination*, since imagination, individual and collective, is the very entity that modulates the way that world literature is "performed" as an institution. Hence, by Pieter Vermeulen's account, a reading that attends to biopolitics and the market in contemporary African migrant writing also enables us to focus on 'the event of reading' (279).

Vermeulen apprehends a useful moment when we read ourselves reading, which ought to disrupt our expectations of the text, expectations that are produced in and by the market either by 'peritexts' or the branding of African authors who are received at the long table of world literature. If the idea of Afropolitanism already frames the event of reading *Ghana Must Go*, for instance, our task is to suspend "the pre-programming" in favour of a reading that does not only situate itself *against* the market. Nor are we to undertake a "surface reading *with* the market" that, as we have seen, sometimes acquiesces to globality's predetermined, socioeconomic configuration (279). Instead, Vermeulen insists on "a reading alongside the market" as a useful parsing method, since it gives us a way to understand world literature through a reading that "attends to the elements that escape capture by either the market or the intentions of the author; a reading that […] targets the 'residue of intentionless'" in such works. A reading alongside the market thus prepares us to encounter the moments when the literature gestures to the ontological status of globality, or the place of human experience within it, the conditions of possibility for the protocols of the text (279).[9]

Remaining on this discursive track that is cleared by a reading alongside the market, and profiting from the *explorative* possibilities it entails, I insert here a discussion of David Scott's critical investigation of postcolonial temporality in our contemporary moment. It would not be a stretch to suggest that the discussion of *globality* in this thesis, or any exploration of the concepts of world, globe, history and so forth, is hopelessly

[9] In *Institutions of World Literature*, edited in collaboration with Stefan Helgesson, Vermeulen goes on to develop the strategy of a reading alongside the market into something he calls a 'world literary reading.' I want to acknowledge the move he makes here, which reads literature's "saturation by the forces of globalisation in order to capture its paradoxical irreducibility to those forces." Still preferring his earlier formulation of a reading alongside the market, I am attempting to capture literature's subsumption under capital, reading specifically for the moments when the text seems to negotiate the predicates of the ethnographic imperative, where it reveals its minimal difference from both the market and the ethnographic imperative. For that reason alone, a reading alongside the market is more direct in the way it denotes what Vermeulen, citing Cheah, refers to as "the exemplary modality of the undecidability that opens a world" (15).

inconsequential if it is not, at the same time, a discussion of the temporal politics that establish our socioeconomic present. Indeed, a discussion of temporality remains significant since it helps us appreciate the place of the imagination in globality, and thus the ways in which African migrant writing relates to the conditions of its own becoming, its specific place on the temporal index of world literature. If we back bench the utility of the imagination in our efforts to investigate the world making potential of African writing, we come upon a problem. Because, apart from the faculty of imagination, what other avenues are available for a reading that, in some way, undoes the quasi-foundational logic in which we are otherwise trapped? The point here is that if this writing can be apprehended as something profoundly modulated by the spiritual rather than the merely spatial or material world, this would be a significant step towards this vision of social justice and a liberated world that all these texts, in their different ways, are demanding.

At a certain spiritual level, the African migrant writing in this thesis helps us to locate the modalities of stasis and stagnancy in globality. Therefore, it will be important to add temporal politics as one essential apparatus in the toolkit that we use to dissect world literature, particularly African migrant writing. In order to establish the *mise-en-scène* of globality, the political space in which this writing is produced, I will now discuss the relation between global capitalism and the imagination, by drawing on Scott's work on the figure of capitalism in postcolonial temporality. In *Omens of Adversity*, Scott is preoccupied with the ontological status of time, or more precisely, with temporality, "the lived experience of time passing" or the social relation between the past, what he calls "the time of memory", the present "the time of consciousness" and future "the time of anticipation" (1). By understanding the present mode of production, global capitalism, as a legacy of the past, Scott suspects that we can just about make sense of "a new time consciousness" that has come to preoccupy contemporary theory, and to understand "the nonexistence of the past, the not-yet of the future, the fleeting instant of the present" which stands in contrast to "the divine transparency and constancy of eternity" (1). He is concerned, furthermore, with "the temporality of the aftermaths of political catastrophe, the temporal disjunctures involved in living *on* in the wake of past political time, amid the ruins, specifically, of postcolonialist and postcolonial futures past" (2). For him, the aftermaths of postcolonial liberation, or even a revolution, seems to raise an acute awareness of time, such that it is felt in ways that are at once familiar and strange, they bring about an "accentuated experience of temporality, of time as *conspicuous*, as "out of joint" (as Hamlet unnervingly put it)" (2). In every respect,

the temporality of globalisation not only frames the lives of the subjects in the writing that I examine, but it also reflects an experience of time and temporality where time is:

> standing *away*, so to speak, from its conventional grounding and embeddedness in history, its modern handmaiden, so that time and history, at once barely distinguishable, seem no longer synchronized, much less synonymous – as though time had found itself *betrayed* by history, or that history now confronted us as inauthentic time, the irreversibly lapsed time of our former anticipations of political futurity (2).

This is an articulation of the experience of living with and in an anachronism or a non-futurity that comes with the linear time of economic development and progress, distinctive as the prevailing mode of production, global capitalism, insofar as it seems to have finally reached its self-actualisation, expansion and financialisation on a global scale. From the perspective of the temporal history leading up to our moment, a history in which time is headed towards a blank future to come; revolutions, interregnum political spaces, and post-civil rights victories, provide a vantage point from which to consider "the nature of historical-political action" (3). The very idea of a revolution has, importantly, "been a founding paradigm for the modern organization of political time, for connecting old endings to new beginnings and therefore […] connecting our dissatisfactions with the past to our hopes for alternative futures" (3). Scott intuits a time, such as that leading up to the cusp of a revolutionary moment, where it is indeed possible to imagine something like a socialist or redistributive state, and in which expectation is part of the revolutionary *imaginer*, a time where revolutionary futures, in retrospect, were "not merely possible but *imminent*; not only imminent, but *possible*" (4). He is concerned, in other words, about the seemingly irreversible decimation of the collective imagination; where once a postcolonial socialism was a realistic expectation, it now seems that our mode of thinking is stumped by the static but always arresting presence of global capitalism.

With this attention to futurity, Scott moves in the opposite direction of theorists who treat time or temporality as an unfolding of historical time, whose teleology is our state of modernity that originates from 'progress' (5). So, temporality is infrastructural to capitalism as an organising system, itself arranged according to "a notion of discrete but continuous, modular change, in particular, modular change as a linear, diachronically stretched-out *succession* of cumulative instants, an endless chain of displacements of before and after", which enables him to locate his theorisations in another temporal district, where the gradual

"evolution of successive forms of the present gives way in an eschatological moment to a utopian future in which the alienated, reified time of capitalism is overcome, and socialist humanity finally coincides with the time of its historical destiny" (6). By concerning himself with the time and temporality of postcolonial nations, Scott seems also to be responding to the neoliberal victory speech that unsettled many in the wake of Fukuyama's neoliberal ideology, because rather than global capitalism, it is this alternative non-capitalist vision of the future that is "the awaited end of history, when time is at one realized and cancelled" (6). This is directly related to the vision of the static present of globality that concerns Cheah in his invocation of 'world' and 'globe', as outlined in the Introduction, because it has to do with the imaginative potential that world literature can proffer in the contemporary moment. Scott has good reason to highlight the connection between the temporal dimensions of political action and the function of the imagination since he himself belongs to a generation of Caribbeans for whom, in the 80s, the widespread revolutionary socialist expectation, or the wellspring of a mere hope for a socialist possibility in the political and collective imaginary, was beginning to quickly dry up, as global finance capitalism revved up its gear on the road to planetary and self-destruction, metamorphosing into crude shareholder capitalism.

Nonetheless, where once we relied on a temporality that framed our meaningful experiential references, we find ourselves now tussling with the obstinacy of a present world that is, in the words of William Wordsworth, 'too much with us', and what remains is only a series of *aftermaths* "in which the present seems stricken with immobility and pain and ruin; a certain experience of temporal *afterness* prevails in which the trace of futures past hangs like the remnant of a voile curtain over what feels uncannily like an endlessly extending present" (6). At their best, the texts that I examine demonstrate, in their own individual ways, a concern with the ontological status of global capitalist time. For one thing, there is the underlying concern with spatio-temporality and the geography of pain in Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*. We can add to that, as Cole's *Open City* is at pains to stress, the concern with memory as a living object in the vanishing present. Perhaps most urgently, the existential and, indeed, temporal dimensions of the aftermaths of revolutionary failure that result in African migrants who finds themselves unremittingly stretched by menial labour in Mengestu's compelling narrative, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* or Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. As the remaining chapters will show, the writing that I have assembled in this thesis contains a type of esoteric structure that possibly resists authorial intentionality. In a way, it registers a response to the crisis of globalisation and global contemporaneity at the level of the imagination, which is intimated by the machinations of globality that frame

all these works. Accordingly, this literature's potential for world making implores us, for instance, to cast our attention not only on the magnitude of suffering in the writer's former homeland, or to the nostalgia brought about by migration, or even to the struggles of identity in the adopted homeland. Rather, they oblige us to activate the imagination as an instrument that can unsettle the enterprise of globalisation that frames the novels in the first place.

To that extent, this sense of time as frozen in the present is depicted most acutely in Mengestu's novel, which presents us with a narrator-protagonist who is paralyzed by his socio-economic position, alongside his two African migrant friends who both stake a claim on the American Dream, unrelentingly enlisting themselves for migrant menial labour as they attempt to climb the social ladder. The narrator, Sepha, by contrast, seems to have resigned himself to the enduring and protracted presence of global capitalism. Stuck in a kind of social immobility, he appears to think of himself as the subject and result of global capitalism rather than as an agent of his own destiny, the kind promulgated by the American Dream. This kind of capitalism is, in turn, made visible by the ensuing gentrification of his neighbourhood, a backdrop that accentuates the narrator-protagonist's postcolonial melancholia. This is an example of migrant writing that interrupts the laws of a merely cultural globalisation, or a cosmopolitanism understood only aesthetically, in that the novel underscores an economic dimension to the migrant question while, side by side, the text features a melancholic tenor which attends to the more existential dimensions of the African migrant within globalisation.

In all these examples above, the novels invite a reading alongside the market that, when undertaken, exposes the exploitative and voracious character of globality, which constitutes the very sense of "an unexamined conception of time" that concerns Scott in his book about postcolonial temporality. And so Scott is taken by how our sense of the present as 'ruined time' has implications for the ways in which we negotiate our moral and political predicaments at an imaginative level, noting that "it is precisely when the future has ceased to be a source of longing and anticipation that the past has become such a densely animated object of enchantment" (13). In the remaining chapters, we will see how, in Mengestu, Selasi and Cole's novels, the past is not only taken to be a repository of disenchantment and failures, there to be *overcome* by the present. It is, in a sense, there to be "excavated" and to be "memorialised" which is exactly the function of recalling the past in and as the present (13). This is why on Scott's temporal radar, the past *then* was significant only to the extent that it was "tethered to the engine of history driving inexorably towards the future" while in the current temporal horizon, by contrast, "the past has loosed itself from the future and acquired a quasi-autonomy; far from depending on any other time, it seems now to exist for

its own sake, as a radiant source of wisdom and truth" (13). This sense of the past, or the present as past or ruined time, can only exist as we are gripped by a global political inertia induced by global finance capitalism, which has established such a situation in which the imagination finds it difficult to transcend the reality circumscribed by the triumph of democracy as free marketing. This is the nastier version of the end of history, one brought on by neoliberalism, and one in which time is overcome, and at once assimilated into the chronological (even teleological) time of World History (12).

If one wanted to support Scott's reading of the present moment of global capitalism, one could go back a little further to trace the philosophical discussions about society's march towards progress, capitalism's forward thrust. In a way, our sense of the present moment of global capitalism is something like an experience of time that is endlessly extending, the ruined time of capitalism, this existence in the unhinged socio-economic world of globality. Yet this experience was present in earlier stages of capitalism's evolution. For instance, various iterations of this sense of being stranded in the present have found expression in numerous thoughtful voices such as Hannah Arendt who, writing in 1958 in the aftermath of the Second World War, elaborated the nature of humankind from the perspective of the *action* which they can carry out, and found that they brought up revealing aspects about the political organisation, namely the destruction of political freedom and the diminishing of human agency. Although of a different era, she prefigures the contemporary moment when she questioned, for instance, why the political zeitgeist of her time was faced with the paradox that it would prefer to ignore; that although we, as humans, can claim technological advancement and human inquiry at an unprecedented scale (what in the discourse of geopolitics is called 'development'), it seems our investment in an implausible, conservative temporal horizon of modernity has left us with the feeling that we are increasingly less equipped to handle the consequences of our political *action* (Arendt xv).

We are, as she puts it, subject to the dangers of human action, "which sets off new processes beyond the actor's control, including the very processes that have given rise to modern society" (xiii). Of course, Arendt clarifies in *The Human Condition* that this analytical framework is only one among many, given that "matters of practical politics" require us to acknowledge that we are dealing with problems for which there need not only be one possible solution, but whose truth can only be assessed when we examine the scene of our actions and therefore the scene of our social production (5). Nonetheless, we are situated in an understanding of the human condition from the perspective of what she calls "our newest experiences and our most recent fears" which are nothing if not "a matter of thought,

and *thoughtlessness* – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of "truths" which for her, represent "the outstanding characteristic of our time" (5 emphasis added). For my own purposes, Arendt's instructive hermeneutic would suggest a reading of the texts as primarily bound up, indissociable from, human action, but particularly *political* action. In the Arendtian mode, it is important to receive the texts as bearing the trace of the temporal world from whence they come:

> Whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence. This is why men, no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings. Whatever enters the human world of its own accord or is drawn into it by human effort becomes part of the human condition. (9)

By what logic shall we understand our present condition, then, if not, at bottom, as a condition characterised by our incapacity to mobilise thought and action, to activate it in the direction of a kind of planetarity that could save us from the vicious waves of capitalism? A version of globality finds its expression in Ardent who apprehends a "thoughtlessness", that has come to characterise the age of capitalist modernity. Residing in the same speculative district, it is precisely this human condition, this relationship to time and temporality, that also led a pensive, if caustic Jameson to quip, tongue firmly in cheek, that nowadays, it is almost "easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (Future City 76). Jameson, whose oeuvre consists of decades of extended meditations on what he's called the "darkness" of globalisation, had spoken of the world market as "the ultimate horizon of capitalism" and has since shifted the focus in the discourse of globalisation from its preferred preoccupation with pluralism and "identity" (57), to a discursive zone where the exigencies of a class-sensitive reading practice would come to the fore (57).

At the centre of Jameson's literary practice, in addition to tracing the shifting temporal index of the modern world, and charting the movement from time to space, lies a politics of reading that primarily attends to the class question in the text. I want to consider briefly two exemplary directives, his book *The Cultures of Globalisation*, and one of his later essays, aptly entitled "The End of Temporality", both of which seek ways by which we are to make sense of "[t]he becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural" within globalisation (Cultures 60). Jameson, too, very clearly preoccupies himself

with the stranglehold of global capitalism, and the accompanying loss of a truly just political alternative to the arrested temporality, the frustrating out-of-jointness of time. As with Scott, Jameson wants to understand the means by which globalisation coerces all the national markets and the productive zones of once sovereign states, into a rapid assimilation into one single temporal sphere "a world-system from which "delinking" […] is henceforth impossible and even unthinkable and inconceivable" (57). Indeed, Jameson persistently foregrounds our temporal predicament insofar as, for him, the present is no longer a hopeful temporal moment between a past that must be overcome and a just future politics-to-come that must yet be claimed. This specifically Hegelian/Marxist concept of temporality, today seems to be decimated by the coercion of nation states into the machinery of global capitalism that organises countries into debtor states and creditor states under the guise of globalisation. Just as Arendt draws her attention to "the setting for politics rather than politics itself" (ix), the conditions of possibility for political action are evidently quite key for Jameson. A discursive encounter with Jameson, then, reveals the importance of the imagination in thinking temporality, since imagining utopian futures (or imagining the end of global capitalism) is necessarily idealistic when temporality has been abrogated by capital. The future can only be thought through in idealistic terms, and if we inherit Hegel's original idealism, Jameson implies, we might come to understand how the mobilisation of the *imagination* in the political organisation of the world plays itself out. He observes that Hegel's impetus:

> lies rather precisely in those things he was capable of exploring because he was an idealist: namely, the categories themselves, the modes and forms of thought in which we inescapably have to think things through, but which have a logic of their own to which we ourselves fall victim if we are unaware of their existence and their in-forming influence on us. (75)

One of the conceptual threads interwoven in this thesis has to do with the political dimensions of time, and thus with the temporal dimensions of the political. If we come at these texts in a spiritual way, a novel such as *We Need New Names*, for instance, becomes more than a statement about questions of identity or a concern with some nostalgia for the homeland. Rather, it takes on a view of the enduring out-of-jointness of time in globality, politically speaking, as it exposes the operations of the postcolonial state as a site of the perpetual reproduction of colonial, imperial violence, inaugurated by the withdrawal of civil liberties, the threat to personhood, the continuous suspension of justice. The first half of the

novel reveals the precarity of citizenship and subalternity, with the omniscient figure of the border that is permeable only to capital. This would accord with the idea that the vibrant writing of particularly the first half of the novel, which is set in Zimbabwe, contains a spiritual impulse which also indicates that something crucial gets lost in the predetermined modalities that come to mind when we say 'African writing'.

Conceptualising the ethnographic imperative

The analysis in the rest of the thesis will demonstrate the ways in which the selected contemporary African migrant works operate at their best when they are subjected to such an ethical politics of reading, one that attends to their stylistic devices, their aspects of form, the very sites through which their effectiveness becomes validated. This is important because, apart from Bulawayo and Osondu, all the writers mentioned in this thesis are inclined to the spirit of Anthony Reed's injunction to "dis-articulate race as a pseudo-ontological category from the ethico-political obligations thought to derive from race as a "lived experience"" (12). However, in this thesis, I argue that that African migrant writing will always have a negotiating relationship with the task of disarticulating from various pseudo-ontological categories, 'black', 'African' 'migrant', 'Afropolitan', 'third-world literature' and so on.[10] For the most part, the works in this thesis stage a type of disarticulation from the national and the nation state, yet the task of responding to the ethnographic imperative is easier said than done. Some of these authors, Cole and Selasi for instance, take 'African writer' or 'African literature' and other such designating practices that rely on the nation-state, precisely to be pseudo-ontological. They question the fragile stability of these categories. But, if the writers aspire to have their work transcend their positionality as African migrants from the obligations that are placed upon them in the world literary arena, they encounter a problem when it comes to the implicit injunction to produce literature that responds to a call, if not from the political moment, then certainly from the publishing industries and valuing communities that create the demand and the very circuits through which the writers become visible in the first place. This is the situation that I call the double bind of African migrant writing.

[10] For a thorough discussion of Afropolitanism, see Mbembe, Achille. 2007. "Afropolitanism." In *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. While the debates surrounding the concept, offering insightful commentary about mobility and space are indeed important (see, for instance, Gehrmann, Susanne. "Cosmopolitanism with African roots: Afropolitanism's ambivalent motilities", 2015) my discussion travels a somewhat different path, in the direction of world literature's conditions of possibility.

We see its outlines, for example, in the laudatory way in which Cole's *Open City* has been celebrated for its dramatising of the relation between objective and subjective experience, or the way it has impressed virtually every reviewer from the major magazines and newspapers for its treatment of spatial relations while employing a decidedly melancholic tenor. This tinge of existential angst is sometimes understood to run counter to the general tropological devices that are seemingly typical of African migrant writing in general. The fact that the novel is celebrated for doing things that are unusual for the literary practice in the field by which it is taxonomised, already reflects the pre-arranged ideological lens that establishes the situation of the double bind. Imagine if the novel had simply been written as a story whose device and gravitational centre was not the Baudelairean fláneur, or if it had stayed clear of conjoining such a fláneury figure with other apparently European modalities such as, in the congratulatory words of one reviewer, "the roving "I" of European romantic modernism" (Foden para 7). But even such a thought experiment has something to say about the signature and incursion of the double bind; why should we think that the moment it embraces literary strategies which are considered typical of African writing, the text becomes a matter of 'simply' doing something? As though the real and formidable challenge, the true test of literary and aesthetic value for African writing comes with whether and how such writing distances itself from the creative topography and the literary strategies of 'African literature', itself generally taken to be as predictable and dry as the dusty villages it depicts.

From the perspective of contemporary world literature, and African migrant writing in particular, one cannot imagine what constitutes 'interesting' writing. Why the need, as Cheah wants us to ask, to draw so sharp a cleavage between 'theme', which in this case is often associated with the supposed simplicity and singularity of postcolonial politics, and 'form' which apparently has a universal aesthetic value judgment? (*WIW* 18). Notice the double bind at work. It is this structural dilemma in the institution of world literature that I argue these texts negotiate in interesting and compelling ways. In *Globality: The Double Bind of African Migrant Writing*, I argue that African migrant writing's relational existence to the world it moves across is forever marked by a moment of a serious incursion by the ethnographic imperative. I will elaborate the character of this imperative by way of a metaphor of the Ronellian telephone call, which violently interrupts the supposed autonomic peace at the writer's desk and, with the persistence of the vibration of an incoming call from an anonymous number, it demands to be acknowledged, picked up at once, as though there was

nothing to its interruption. That moment, that call, and the response to it, I argue, is structural to the positioning of African migrant writing.

It will be useful here to add an important observation to the inventory of world literature, in terms of our being-in-the-world that is globality, and how this condition, this specific authorial positionality, establishes the scene of African migrant writing and the ethnographic imperative. Already in the 1980s, elaborating the aporia of ethical relations, and trying to understand the destabilisation of the Other as the addressee, Avital Ronell put in place a general concept metaphor for what constitutes our ethical relationship with the Other. Ronell is not alone in thinking about being and ethics, interpellation, in this way. She inherits a rich rhetorical stratagem from her friend and teacher, Jacques Derrida, to which she adds a spirited spunk that allows us to allegorically think through the ways in which we are adjacent to the Other. In this respect, I add her in to the ring, tag-teaming with another deconstruction Marxist-feminist, Spivak, who has also suggested, still following Derrida, that "to be born human is to be born angled towards another and others" (*AE* 97). What does it mean to have your work inescapably shaped, radically determined, by the interrupting presence of the Other? Taking our constitutive relational existence of being thrust into such a violent structure in which we are unavoidably adjacent to the other, Ronell organises around the idiom of the telephone and the phone call to suggest that 'the call', directed at an (un)intended addressee, and coming as it does to the reluctant recipient without any announcement, demands to be answered. In that way, the telephone already frames us in relation to an outside world by virtue of its mere existence, its being constituted an absent presence. In other words, even prior to picking up signal, and much prior to the moment of the call itself, the subject is already operative within a network of other subjects and objects, since to be what it is, the telephone must presuppose another telephone, another signal somewhere in the ether, even if the singularity of the telephone, its material apparatus, is what comes to mind when we say 'telephone' (Ronell, *TTB* 3).

But the telephone is rather 'unthinkable' as a singular thing, it can only be a telephone if it is already pluralised (3). Multiplied as it is, we can only think it in relation to another line, 'another telephone' 'somewhere' out there (3). Convinced that philosophy is to be found in the unexpected, the inexpressible, where it does not appear, Ronell is drawn to the minutiae of our everyday lives in a way that enables her, in *The Telephone Book*, to reveal the objects' fundamental performative contradiction, which is also the thing that constitutes the telephone's peculiar quality as a metonymic device for understanding African writing. Because, even when it is not ringing, the telephone or the transmission line at once holds

together what it separates, and to that extent, it connects the writer (and indeed the writing) to a world that seems to impose impossible, if undecidable, demands on her work.

We will begin to see how this metaphor is useful for the way I understand the very constitutive being of the world literary stage, the world literary sphere of capitalist globalisation. Such a world is not only a site that can be circumscribed or located, but it is also the subterranean impulse, the transmission cable that streams in multiple calls and demands at once, calls that must be answered, calls about the national subject, or perhaps the anti-racist call, the call to be class-sensitive, the call to be attuned to the gendered subject, the call for the memorialised, the de-territorial call and de-nationalised and so forth. In the context of globalisation, then, contemporary African migrant writing remains radically open to the outside, the wholly Other, exposed to the very *possibility* of a call from them, an interjection that threatens with a call that someone such as Ian Banks, being a white and European writer, will never have to field. It is this openness, and predisposition to intrusion, that concerns me in this thesis, the temporal dimensions of the answerability of the call in the first place, and the somewhat transcendental predicament of answering the call, of registering a response to the irreversible moment of interruption.[11]

Of course, in this context, as I will show in the chapters that follow, even refusing to answer the call, as some writers correctly do, is itself a type of answer. If, as I argue throughout, the ethnographic imperative is structural to the conditions of possibility of the texts, then the negotiation of the double bind, that is, the various types of responses the writers register to the violent interruption of the call, may have something to tell us about the subject on the other end of the line. This will be unpacked in greater detail in the thesis, as I show how the double bind, the telephone unremittingly ringing off the hook, already establishes a situation in which, whether or not the writer picks up the receiver, the network is already operative, the phone is already plugged into a type of global circuit, with the electric charge of globalisation in full flow.

[11] Ronell: "What does it mean to answer the telephone, to make oneself answerable to it in a situation whose gestural syntax already means yes, even if the affirmation should find itself followed by a question mark: Yes? No matter how you cut it, on either side of the line, there is no such thing as a free call. Hence the interrogative inflection of a yes that finds itself accepting charges. To the extent that you have become what you are, namely, in part, an automatic answering machine, it becomes necessary for questions to be asked on the order of, Who answers the call of the telephone, the call of duty, or accounts for the taxes it appears to impose? Its reception determines its *Geschick*, its destinal arrangement, affirming that a call has taken place. But it is precisely at the moment of connection, prior to any proper signification or articulation of content, that one wonders, Who's there?" (5).

At the very moment that we bring up the syntax of aesthetic value for African migrant writing, we become at once inserted into a receptive radio frequency, connected at a subterranean level to that same static telephone line that produces the call to which these writers must attend. Jamming on this line of reasoning, I am interested in tracing, textually, the unexpressed motifs that exactly this predicament presents; if we permit these African migrant writers the illusion of choice, what happens to the works of those whose answer to the call is *not* to answer it? And, as Osondu and Bulawayo's case demonstrates, is it possible, in any empowering way, to answer the call of the double bind in the affirmative, giving something of a warm embrace to the anticipated statement of meaning, the supposed African-ness of the text? Both these questions are situated on the register of the mastership of interpellation in globalisation, the calcified world order that I call globality, and that must, as these texts imply, be contested.

Since one of the key problems I explore in this dissertation is that of temporality and its relation to the production of the field of African literature and responses to it, I draw on the significant work of Anthony Reed who in his book, *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing*, very astutely points out that the celebratory tone we often assume in our accounts and understandings of post-resistance movements such as the Civil Rights Movement, for example, present the problem of temporality and time, insofar as the triumphant discursive tone that frames our discussions about these movements obscures the view of an alternative temporal politics, in which black experimental writing participates in a "larger contest over racial time" (207). For Reed, the past half century has created a situation whereby "those narrowly defined concessions have limited possibilities for social justice organising and, worse, stunted the ability to imagine radical alternatives to neoliberal governmentalities" (6). Far from enabling action, these triumphant post-liberation narratives, which can be understood as accounts of temporal politics "make the repetition of that success unlikely, even anomalous, while making larger transformations difficult if not impossible to articulate" (6). So, the blockage in political action has something to do with globality, to the extent that "[t]he present masquerades as the fulfilment, or only thinkable outcome, of the past" which frustrates the expression of "alternative visions of the world" (6). I find common ground with Reed at several significant junctures. He worries, as I do, that because of prearranged constructions that have come to inform our understanding of black writing, it suffers "the presumption that black writer's condition of intelligibility is addressing a narrowly conceived social problem" (6). Reed is talking here about black writing in general, and he is especially interested in diasporic and African-American writers, but I hope to

demonstrate how this also plays itself out in the situation, specifically, of contemporary African migrant writing.

The notion that there exists a global scene, a world literary marketplace, *into* which African migrant writing gains entry because of its ability to reproduce cultural globalisation, is an idea that already assumes an incursion of the autobiographical, which disturbs the mode of "self-production" (14) that Reed argues bears directly on the "methodological priority" (8) of form and poetics. Accordingly, the method of an ethical politics of reading that I propose engenders, to borrow his formulation, "a reconsideration of a more radical literary politics that is not rooted in the politics of the author or the determinant political situation to which the work "*responds*"" (12 emphasis added). In a similar way, the African migrant texts that I consider in this thesis introduce literary possibilities for disaggregating, or at least palliating, the ethnographic imperative.

An ethical politics of reading, targeting the spirit of contemporary African migrant writing

A few remarks about the event of reading must be made. Apropos the question of writing that appears to receive its memorandum from the nominal urgency of an 'ensemble of social forces', Reed offers a breakthrough for our philosophical and literary positing when he notes that literature that owes its being to this urgency, will no doubt need to articulate the socio-political pressures that mark it, and that it in turn marks. However, warns Reed, "in the name of an analysis of literature the question of the literary, and of reading, is forgotten" (1).

In a similar vein, the African migrant writing in this thesis takes on something of an 'eternity', a relation with the future that is, by necessity, unverifiable and incalculable.[12] I will show in this thesis how African migrant writing seems to animate another temporal logic, one angled towards a future to come, in those moments when it does not merely respond to the political moment that frames it in advance, as though the world were indeed created by globalisation, or as though the literature is positioned as a response to the given world of world literature. This happens only in those moments when the writing does not

[12] Let me offer a supporting example to this discussion via a consideration of the politics of textual production, as they pertain to a recent novel that has emerged onto the world literature scene. Speaking about the twenty-year gap between the publication of her acclaimed debut novel and her latest work of fiction, Arundhati Roy mentions that the process of writing fiction is different to writing works that are at the behest of a political moment, one called for by the situation. When writing essays and memoirs the concern is with the immediate, more 'urgent' political response. As a result, Roy believes that "the difference between the fiction and the non-fiction is simply the difference between urgency and eternity" (Roy 16).

seem to have taken its impetus from the urgency of the present, when it does not express itself as though it were summoned by the power of the world literary stage. Since a vision of an alternative to capitalism is at stake for my reading, the literature in this thesis, when it operates at its best, sidestepping the ethnographic imperative, also appears to raise questions about the blockages of the present moment, the sense of stalled time, of being held captive by the tightened stranglehold of the *past as present*, a present constituted, ultimately, by a global capitalism that is by now fully indifferent to its spreading savagery and plunderous violence. If we approach African migrant literature from this perspective, one important point becomes clear; in its spiritual meditations on globality or the end state of globalisation, the ostensible 'end of history'; the writing considered in this thesis is written in such a way that it puts on the agenda a concern with time *after* the end of history, that is, after the end of a progressive historicist sense of temporality. Whether in the chrono-schism of the non-linear narratives, or the topicality of any of the works, they each mobilise memory, trauma and justice in a way that suggests an attuning to the ontological status of globality.

If this reading seems fanciful at first, I hope it will be provocative in the end, as I tease out these moments when the writing negotiates the double bind structural to its positionality, by putting its finger on the pulse of globality. We will also see how at times, as with Mengestu's novel, for instance, the writing disrupts the linearity of capitalist time, and opens up an itinerary of problems that reflect a sense of the present as ruined time, jammed in a global capitalist world order.

To illustrate the reading practice I am proposing, and to better understand how it plays out in the thesis, we can imagine a painting that aims to capture a specific moment in time, say, a painting of an urban streetscape, complete with moving objects and subjects, street lamps, traffic lights, pedestrians and cyclists coming and going, taxis and so forth – a rich visual/textual milieu. In the centre of the painting, an old man manages a red food stall that grabs the viewers' attention immediately; but the food stall is clearly not the only or main symbolic device in the painting, despite its focused positioning. Instead, the distinct unity of the individual components in the painting, the shadows, the direction in which the wind blows the stall's umbrella tassels, or the cyclist's hair and so forth, all these individual components are what create a narrative thread that communicates the *spirit* of the streetscape, the energy of the moment that is re-presented. To put it another way, this thing that I am calling the spiritual impulse of the text, its world making potential, is to be found not only in the compositional unity or the observable structure of the painting, but also in the element of the incalculable and unverifiable. Taken this way, the spirituality of the novels, their

unexpressed yet palpable concern with temporality, belongs on the same register that can accommodate the investigation of something like an 'eternity,' perhaps even a universality, in these texts.

Moreover, spirituality is also what I am suggesting governs the world making potential of world literature. The idea that a text can express material content that is layered and spiritual owes the debt of its best articulation to Walter Benjamin, who suggests that art, in our case the texts under the banner of world literature, that is charged with a world making impulse will have to bear within it the capacity to convey the spiritual dimension of the world beyond merely the material content of the visible world.

Indeed, if there is one significant element that is common and essential in the texts assembled in this thesis, it is located along the same theoretical axis as Benjamin's conceptions of the truth value or truth content in art. If African migrant literature can lay claim to a world making impulse or power, this power is to be found in what I have been calling the spiritual impulses of the text. If it will help us appreciate the spiritual impulse of the text, we can relate to a similar concept by Benjamin, that of *das Ausdruckslose*, "the expressionless". For Benjamin, the expressionlessness of the text is a "critical violence within the work of art" that "arrest this semblance, spellbinds the movement, and interrupts the harmony" (Stanford 320). He goes so far as to suggest that "only the expressionless completes the work" of art *as* art (rather than, say, nature). What is crucial to note here is the way 'expressionless' constitutes only some of what Benjamin defines as a work's 'truth content'. The other is unity of form, "the semblance or appearance of life that the work itself possesses by virtue of its mimetic capacity for representation: its linguistic expressiveness" (320). The expressionless is therefore that which resists sublimation within mere representational totality. For the circumscribed concerns in this thesis, the spiritual impulse of the text, if we permit, leads us to a consideration of the world making potential of African migrant writing. In that case, if we wanted to trace this potential, how would we go about locating the iterations of the expressionless in contemporary African migrant writing, but quite away from the concern with cultural Afropolitanism or aesthetic cosmopolitanism and so on, those 'isms' and concepts in our vocabulary that have by now proven unable to keep up with mutating forms of economic global capitalist oppression?

By relating the spiritual impulses of the text to other concepts such as 'the expressionless' that operate in a similar fashion, I am attempting to substantiate how my reading does not take these texts as exemplars of particular forms of African cultural production, but as texts that mean more than the categories that frame them. I invoke these

various interpretative idioms in order to justify an engagement with the spiritual impulses of the text. So despite the framing exceed them, or at least, if read in the particular way that I am proposing, their world-making potential can be released.[13] Moreover, this is both a doing and an undoing, making and unmaking of the world. Like Benjamin reading Brecht or Kafka, a reading of the spiritual impulses must accommodate the meaning of these works beyond the enclosing modalities that are sometimes imposed upon them, not only by our reading communities, but also on the part of the writers themselves.

If we are reading alongside the market, the task is to trace meaning not only from the semiotic sign system of the bare sentences themselves, but in the interlinear moments of the texts, to find something of a world making impulse. We can think of the spirit of the text as something like our imagination of the temperature in the streetscape scene that we observe in the hypothetical painting. The spiritual impulse of the text is that which supports our understanding of a normative world literature, or that which at the very least, holds the potential to open a highly incriminating case file against a regimented global capitalist system that produces the unequal political landscapes depicted in the texts. The novels especially, as Selasi's family saga will expose, seem to lodge this case by presenting various intimate nano-portraits, many of them slightly out of focus, but all the more crucial for our grasp of temporality and time in globality. The novel finds its energy in interiority, where the dispositional dimensions of life bump up against the political. While I employ a hermeneutic course that moves between shades of 'distant' and 'close' reading, I am not trying to size up the literature that is understood to be 'African literature' or 'world literature'. Instead, I am scaling down, coming to the micro level of a text, not to develop any theory about African migrant writing writ large, but to examine a few token moments in selected texts when a double bind transpires and leaves traces of its negotiation**.**

[13] Discussing his film on the late Caribbean poet-philosopher's theory of Relationality, Manthia Daiwara mentions Glissant's strong criticism of what he called "the transparency of the cinematic image" which employed a certain "systematic and dogmatic stitching together of shots to make meaning" (para 16). Instead, for Glissant, "what was left out of the frame was as important as what was revealed. Good films for him were those that self-consciously played with showing as a form of disguising, those that reveal by deferring meaning as if to show that by giving an identity they were deliberately hiding its otherness" (para 16).

The place of the imagination

The road on which my analysis travels is paved by Spivakian textual ethics, which have a bearing on my own ethical politics of reading. For Spivak, the imagination must be trained in the habit of democratic intuition since, as she puts it, "we who learn from fiction must think a borderless world of unconditional hospitality" (3). Her task in *Readings* is a decidedly pedagogical one. The humanities will need to develop a practice in the ethics of reading, understanding text not only to be literary, but also filmic, visual, audio-visual and so forth, in order to train the imagination for epistemological performance. This is one way of cultivating a general will for peaceful social justice. As she traces the shifting forms of oppression, and the ways in which we can 'attend' to the borders, not only of the nation state, or those that are marked upon the earth by natural boundaries, but also, the borders of our social construction, of our historical locations, the borders of race, caste, class, gender, the right to education, healthcare, welfare, and intellectual, as opposed to only manual labour (1). What can these texts tell us about these borders? The point is not only to suggest that they demonstrate this or that function of the border, but to wit the extent to which, if read alongside the market, they can have a hortative function, a prod to understanding time, temporality, our time passing, not simply as constituted by a past-present-future trajectory, but as having been so established by globalisation. If 'the world' is made, not given, the imagination surely has a stake in the processes that are involved in the making of a world. The significance of the imagination lies in the fact that it is that which allows us to think the quite Other, but it is also the site upon which we, as human beings, develop a type of ethical sign system (3). Yet, as Spivak proposes, "the possible impulse towards the ethical" through readerly imagination, "has to be activated away from the underived selfishness which also operates in all creaturely life" (3). The literary person engages directly with the imagination, and that is perhaps one of the primary tasks of world literature proper:

> The teacher of literature has nothing else to teach. If we teach literary history, it is on the model of history as a discipline. If we teach literature as evidence – and even Frantz Fanon uses it as evidence – it is on the legal model and so on. But by ourselves, we have nothing else to engage with than training the imagination (4).

What is particularly important about Spivak's futurity in *Readings* is that it not only allows us to intuit our place in globality, but it also prepares us for a moment 'after' globalisation, since she is concerned with cultivating a will to social justice that will outlive liberation, where

literature plays a mediating role by the mere fact that it can mobilise the imagination and enable us to envision other more just worlds, a totally open posture to the other, rooted in "a painstaking learning of the language of the other" (6). Since we are in a global capitalist world order, we are 'organic' to it, in the Gramscian sense (6). At best, we can only strive to become organic intellectuals of capitalist globalisation, stopping perhaps to stress that for Gramsci, the 'organ' is not a question of ecological or biotic matter, but rather denotes the nature in which the subject, produced by the social relations of the hegemonic class that owns the means of production, is organic to that very society, arises out of it, and is thus ethically responsible for it. We will begin to see how this organicity, the result of the specific ways in which global capitalism acts as a social organising schema, seems to frame the writing in advance, and has implications for the way the text is inserted into the circuits of the world literary marketplace.

If the spiritual impulses of the text, a more poetic rather than only hermeneutic element, can convey the dimension of the text that is not immediately perceptible, then the idea of the supplement as understood by Spivak, which is connected to those 'incidental' features of the text that often betray its purported 'meaning', its truth value, brings to the table the irreducible aspects of literature's materiality. Such irreducible elements already frustrate any hermeneutic method of 'interpretation' that does not have a built-in search engine that can excavate the supplement. But because the supplement is coming from the outside, it "introduces the dangerous element of the incalculable, because the supplement is not calculated by the rules of that which it supplements" (12). As for my concerns in the thesis, a mode of reading alongside the market facilitates this supplement which, because we are reading the global market 'against' itself, momentarily escapes the calculations of the thing it is supplementing – escapes, in other words, the precepts of global capitalism that make the texts move in and across mercantile space in the first place. If it will seem unnecessarily exacting to some, I find this provocation appealing; it enables us to image the kind of utopia and vision that Spivak elaborates, one that makes of the imagination an instrument, that is, one that uses the imagination for cultivating the will to social justice for all. In this way, the attention to imagination and epistemic performance is an invitation to think an economically just world away from the nausea of globality. Especially as we are subject to the tumultuous swings of global capitalism on the one hand, and democracy as free marketing on the other, I encourage a reading of African migrant writing in this spirit. I will thus endeavour to illustrate how from the vantage point of such an ethical politics of reading, African migrant writing appears to stage a compelling negotiation of the double bind that

comes with its positionality in globalisation, and thereby consistently frustrates attempts at interpellation. At the same time, I am aware that literature is not, as Spivak reminds us again and again, a type case for anything that can be made into social theory as such.[14] I align myself, conscientiously, with the type of critical intimacy that Spivak proposes, reading the works for their literariness rather than imposing models on them, while being sensitive and attuned to the setting from which they emerge. Ultimately, what I find in these texts, as I show throughout, is not so much evidence or 'proof' about this or that theory as I understand or attempt to elaborate it here, but rather, what I encounter is the idea that African migrant writing can arrange a rendezvous for the excesses that are somewhat harder to make sense of or, harder still, to trace in 'real life' in globality because of their preoccupation with the given world, the sense of time as jammed in market globalisation. This is yet another reason to stress the importance of the imagination in contemporary African migrant writing, and to examine its relation to the world making impulse that constitutes the DNA of the kind of world literature I have outlined in the Introduction and in this chapter. Finally, my objective is not to posit a direct line between the theoretical inventory I have assembled and the literature I am analysing. Rather, I aim to mark some of the resonances, those repeatedly murmured but nevertheless suggestive opacities in this African writing, where it voices the quotidian quality of globality's unremarkable yet structural violence, the type to which we are habituated.

[14] See Spivak, *Readings* (2014): "Many of our dissertations are ruined by the discussion of one piece of literature as evidence for an entire sociological generalization. This is why, and rightly so, we are not taken seriously by the qualitative social scientists, because we treat literature as evidence, thereby demeaning both literature and ourselves, and then we decide that on the basis of one piece of literature, you can draw a conclusion" (47).

Chapter Two:

Globality, Minimalist Writing and the shadow of Interiority in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and E.C. Osondu's *Voice of America*

> With a vast wealth of human material about us, our own writers and artists fear to paint the truth lest they criticize their own and be in turn criticized for it. They fail to see the Eternal beauty that shines through all truth, and try to portray a world of stilled artificial black folk such as never were on land or sea.
>
> --- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Criteria for Negro Art*

This chapter considers two texts by two contemporary African migrant writers, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and E.C. Osondu's *Voice of America*.[15] Both these texts, I argue, operate mostly at a thematic level, where the macro-social commentary that is to be found, however important it ultimately is, seems anchored by a narrative strategy of spacio-geographical exteriority which overshadows the particularity and specificity of individual subjecthood. In the previous chapter, I offered an analysis of the structural interpellation that forces writers to negotiate contradictory forces of what I called the double bind of African migrant writing. I suggested that African migrant writers cannot 'solve' the double bind of contemporary African migrant writing, they can only negotiate it. This double bind, between the market's demand for the ethnographic imperative (or something like (un)strategic ethnification) and the framing of the linguistic operation of globality as globalization, will subtend the chapter that follows.

One way of coming to terms with the principal concern of the thesis, that is, the *structural* ambiguity and duality of African migrant writing, is by attending to the intersections of the theoretical lines that inform my reading, understanding how an

[15] This chapter, as mentioned in the Introduction, stages a complementary reading rather than, strictly speaking, a comparative one. I am holding off on a comparative approach, here, marshalling a reading strategy that does not domesticate or foreignise the writing or the writer. To domesticate or foreignise would be to suggest some archetypical course through the texts, based on their autochthonous position. Instead, a complementary reading of *New Names* and *Voice of America* aims for a fidelity to the specific idiosyncrasies of the writer's play with *Language*. This would be a reading at the level of what Spivak might call 'entering the protocols of the text,' which aims is to get at the writer's specific presuppositions, and how they bear on the language she inherits, creating a lexicon specific to her text. Complementarily, Bulawayo's text does not simply stand next to, in comparison to, Osondu's. A reading of both texts in the manner I will undertake transfers, spills over by deferring the side-by-side methodological procedure. This reading has the potential to add to the overall argument in a way that improves the quality of my general protocol of reading alongside the market.

examination of 'the globe', 'world literature' and so on, as well as the legacy of the Enlightenment Era's rational subject and the epistemic limits attendant with the subject, interact with one another. When unacknowledged, this structural ambiguity has the effect, I argue, of eliding the specificity of authorial interpellation (which should not be confused with the presumed or stated authorial intentions that are the impetus of the writing). It is my hope that by the end of this chapter, readers will come to understand that such frameworks as 'world literature' or 'postcolonial literature', as far as the interpretation of African migrant writing is concerned, will need to be supplemented by an ethical politics of reading, one that centers the status of globality.[16] With such a reading practice, we may arrive at a new enunciatory register that captures the ontology of transnationalism beyond merely the anthropologies of 'the immigrant experience' of displacement or unbelonging and a critique of Euro-Americanism. My wager is that a new register might involve a commitment to understanding particularity, with an emphasis on character interiority. In that way, it allows us to move from an analysis of mainly external codes, and to find recourse in a language that opens up other temporal dimensions, where the attention to interiority holds the potential for a type of world-making, and thus gestures towards a more regenerative spiritual and normative conception of the world. In a way, *We Need New Names* and *Voice of America* are at the barricades of world literature, deploying narrative styles that are often understood to be 'urgent' or 'immediate', and working within a socio-political context that frames the material lives of their characters in palpable ways, even if it means unintentionally thinning out the attention to interiority in the process.

For both these texts, the writing wears its topicality on its sleeves, and the thematic concerns are catalogued more directly than in the texts considered in the subsequent chapters, which are more patently occupied by abstraction, interiority and maximalism which, finally, renders them operative at the spiritual conception of world. By contrast, the two texts in this chapter underscore minimalism and an exteriority, and thereby stage an engagement with the spacio-geographical or material world.[17] In the pages that follow, I will be providing

[16] See my discussion on page 6 of the Introduction, where I argue (borrowing from Imre Szeman) that the dominant approaches to African migrant writing have employed a hermeneutic framework that can only receive the work of these writers in a particular way – obscuring globality and globalisation and, thus, in need of supplementation if are we to better understand the structurally interpellating force of global capitalism and its intercourse with contemporary African migrant writing.

[17] I am aware that the term minimalist has its own specific literary meaning, however contested it remains. While there have been scholars who have understood this term in more theoretical and literary ways (see, for instance, Clare, Robert. *American Literary* Minimalism, Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 2015), and while such discussions are certainly useful and illuminating, my use of the term in this thesis is not conceptual. Neither does the term suggest any limited vision on the part of the author whose writing I identify as

evidence for Bulawayo's and Osundu's minimalist strategy, both by close reading and by considering their placement within U.S. creative writing programmes, an important site of the consecration of contemporary African migrant writers in globality.

This minimalist style has implications for the world making potential of the writing. For instance, in Bulawayo's novel, we are taken through the socio-political topography of a southern African country in crisis, through the lens of a ten-year-old narrator whose limited experience of the world cannot allow access to an interior self. The novel, just as Osondu's book, itemizes a nasty rap sheet of the nefarious operations of the regime of governmentality that bears on the characters' lives in important ways. Yet, because it must shoulder the weight of the macro-social, the novel cannot carry the more abstract qualities of individual experience such as memory, for instance, or the particularity of the psycho-spiritual world through which the characters move. Such a strategy does not, therefore, leave room for a commitment to interiority, at least not the type of interiority and spirituality that concerns the authors considered in the later chapters.

Bulawayo's novel, with the exception of three 'border chapters' narrated by a mature omniscient narrator, relies on the first-person child narrator. Responding to a question about the choice of the child narrator in her novel, Bulawayo mentions that the child narrator's voice is imbued with "spirit and presence" and that it "allowed me to tell the story with more urgency" (Cameron interview, para. 1). If the choice for a narrative device is determined by an incursion of the 'urgency' of the political, the implication is that the novel is responding to a charged moment, overdetermined in advance of its creation. The novel's narrative technique, it seems, responds to a literary order, a discursive subpoena from the high court of African migrant literature, where it exposes a case file of subalternity in Southern Africa and where it is made to account for the socio-political conditions that shape individual and collective subjecthood. In that case, the topicality of the novel seems to interrupt the scope of its aesthetic potential quite prior to the novels commencement, where Bulawayo appears to be suggesting that there are more expedient instruments, such as minimalist exteriority, for the task of articulating the "political context of Zimbabwe […] [and] the complexities of leaving one place behind, and adjusting to another" (Cameron interview, para 1). About the enabling qualities of this narrative device, Bulawayo says: "It allowed me to play on the

'minimalist', nor does it have anything to say about the execution of such a vision, apart from the economy of words and the economy of language in the text. The term is merely a descriptive one, it indicates writing that adheres quite generally to a 'less is more' principle *in relation to writerly urgency*. Hence, my theory and reading practice is located elsewhere, not on this term.

naivety and innocence and frankness of children to handle dense subject matter with an ease that may have otherwise been a bit more difficult had I been dealing with adults" (Cameron interview para 18). While we might grant that the idea of a minimalist or pared down language, from the perspective of the child, can illuminate the macro-social problems of the novel appropriately, it is also important to consider that the child narrator, as the primary narrative device, does not possess the access code to the narrative's zone of interiority and particularity.

As we will see, the child narrator proves less useful for the challenge to get at the spiritual, less tangible elements of subjecthood, since she does not possess the type of introspective abilities more common in adults better equipped to navigate this interior zone. This is one reason why this approach, the child narrator (indeed any narrator) who is necessarily minimalist, has long been debated by postcolonial writers of an earlier generation. For instance, in her 1989 article, "Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!" published in the *New York Times*, the South-Asian American writer Bharati Mukherjee decried the wave of minimalist texture that had become the predictable go-to subgenre for the émigré writer in America. This call for migrant writing's turn to detail and particularity emerged in the zeitgeist of the early nineties, where migrant writing focused too much on the idea of one's being suspended between cultures, often with the former homeland as that which writers nostalgically reference. This provocation came at a moment when postcolonial literature had reached its zenith, with cultural studies and globalisation studies, as well as the concept of cosmopolitanism, preparing to assume centre-stage as *the* focus areas in the humanities.

Already, there is benefit in taking a brief off-ramp off the highway of African literature, momentarily avoiding the traffic of its concerns with 'representation', if only to reconnect to it via the more general slip road of 'world literature'. Mukherjee, having just recently been granted citizenship in the United States, opens her essay by announcing to the American reader that "I am one of you now" (para. 1). Keeping aside her well known anxieties about nation-statehood, the statement highlights the contingency of the ethnographic imperative of postcolonial literature. It prefigures her embrace of maximalist writing, which is diametrically opposed to the minimalist form that, for her, has been an imposition on her creativity, as well as an injustice to the readers of migrant writing, to the extent that it pressured autochthonous positionality to reduce the range of migrant writing to the exteriority and bare life of the former homeland or the adopted homeland. In a way, Mukherjee's anxiety can be read in a new light, to argue that writers who attend to the status of *globality*, and who

deflect the call of the ethnographic imperative will be less weighed down by the nostalgia of the homeland, if that is one of the calls issued by the ethnographic imperative.

The exteriority that comes with minimalism is, therefore, both medicine and poison. If the author finds it enabling, minimalism simultaneously compromises the narrative's ethico-political reach, since the writing often assumes a macro-political imperative in advance. As Mukherjee warns, it can also become a type of "mannered and self-referential" writing that is ungrounded by the writers' immediate psycho-spiritual surroundings, geographically bounded in a past whose lingering effects in the present become secondary. Her point, though, is not merely that writers within the U.S. should not write about or view things through the lens of their native lands, since the culture is, after all, "in our eyes and ears […] and in some special categories of our brains" (qtd. In McGurl 372). Rather, the writer should attend to the contemporary American scene, in our case the scene of globality, in an always reflective way. This is one reason why we can think of the immigrant's "perceptual habits acquired elsewhere", and how, when such habits are combined with her "hunger to belong in a new country", can offer a supplementary narrative programme that might revivify a literary field that has been "sunk in decades of minimalism" (372). If this seems very prescriptive, it might be because the argument essentially implies that a migrant writer should write about their positioning in the U.S. rather than their relationship to Africa. This formula seems shaky when it appears to reproduce a kind of hegemony with the U.S. as always the primary scene of globality. It is surely difficult, for this reason, to follow Mukherjee all the way through with her argument; it leads us into the night. But what is interesting to me, for the purposes of this chapter, is that the call for maximalism seems to delimit the latitudinal power of the minimalist technique by insisting on the capaciousness of the migrant writer's narrative modalities. In short, the call for maximalism in world literature introduces a sort of literary home that can accommodate aspects of particularity and interiority which, it appears, have been served with an eviction notice by the ethnographic imperative, and instructed to make room for urgency and immediacy. "Minimalism is deft," Mukherjee said on the occasion of her citizenship, but it is only:

> [a] shorthand of shared, almost coded responses to collective dread. Dread over what exactly? Well there's aging and there's fear of commitment and there are all sorts of variants on divorce and childlessness and dead-end jobs and midlife crises. […] Minimalist techniques seem a healthy response to too much communication, too much manipulation and too much of any-and-everything […] [but] I feel that minimalism

> disguises a dangerous social agenda. Minimalism is nativist, it speaks in whispers to the initiated. As a newcomer [to the U.S], I can feel its chill, as though it were designed to keep out anyone with too much story to tell. (28)

Mukherjee's dramatic pronouncement here should not be taken only as a throwaway remark, since in its essence, it aims at that which is somewhat beyond the evidentiary, gesturing, in other words, to the singular and unverifiable, the incalculable phenomena of subjecthood which is likely to be foreclosed by an exteriority that keeps out anyone 'with too much of a story to tell'. Now, for African migrant writing to negotiate the double bind of its positionality, it cannot only serve as evidence of the material consequences of a particular socio-political system within globalisation. Equally, it must be able to capture the complex story of subject formation within capitalist globalisation, emphasising the interiority of the subject that exists within an overdetermined world. If we read bifocally, with Bulawayo and Osondu, we can trace the similarities of the narrative strategies, and how they are influenced by the writers' positionality. As we will see, both authors emerge from within the U.S higher education system, both have the honour of the Caine Prize, obtained following a strikingly similar trajectory. As far the awards are concerned, both texts have been lauded for their similarly urgent narrative strategies and thematic concerns.

Of course, one could argue that, by themselves, the texts are not enough to constitute a model by which to evaluate the efficaciousness of a general negotiation with the double bind of African migrant writing. That is, they do not necessarily constitute a type case for a 'theory' of African migrant writers' minimalist writing. Still, if we consider both texts and their entanglements with the system of globalisation within which they exist, we can offer some provisional suggestions about the geopolitics of textual production, and how they bear on the texts' attitude towards interiority. We can also ask what the readerly imagination can achieve when given access to interiority, or how such access would enable us to grapple with perplexities of globality. Recall that although Cheah's definition of a normative force grants that "there are merits to understanding literary phenomena beyond the nation-state framework" he warns that "the fundamental short-coming of equating the world with a global market is that it assumes that globalisation creates a world" (5). As a result, we come to think of African migrant writings' relationship to capitalist globalisation in a restrictive way, where it assumes a merely reactive position (5). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter One, such an understanding denies a normative force of world literature since, according to Cheah, "[t]he normative force of world literature refers to its power or efficacy to change the world

according to a normative ethicopolitical horizon. It is this concept of normativity that "informs all spiritual accounts of the world" (6). Therefore, to pose a question about the readerly imagination is also, at the same time, to question the world-making potential of world literature, the type which insists on a normative force of the world that privileges its temporal dimensions first and foremost.

The ethnographic imperative and systematic creativity

In order to understand the significance of the narrative strategies of these two contemporary African migrant texts, we may wish to arrange a meeting for the texts, put them into conversation with one another at the rendezvous of world literature, and trace in them the similarities and dissimilarities, the potentialities and limitations, of the minimalist modality that is necessitated by an urgency. The conditions of possibility for their emergence will also connect, in the end, to some of the questions about aesthetic value that preoccupy this chapter. Indeed, on the announcement of Osondu's shortlisting for the Caine Prize, Meakin Armstrong, the nominating editor, said of Osondu's text that: "It isn't pretentious nor rife with trickery. It's simply a well-told story about a kind of life most of us can only imagine. [It is] an extraordinary bouquet of stories, poems, social commentary and art" (para 1). Indeed, one wonders what it means when an adjudicator of world literature declares that an African writer is not 'pretentious'. What would he be pretending to? Is the implication, here, that to involve complexity is to pretend as though one is a European writer? And if so, we can ask tongue only half in cheek, what would complexity ('trickery') make of the writer? A pretentious African? And of course, that the author portrays a life 'most of us can only imagine' may infer that he is being understood as a cultural broker, and that he is not, in fact, imagining the life of which we read in the short stories, or that the short stories are, in truth, anthropological units. This is the ethnographic imperative staring down at the texts, and to which the texts must stand up and assert their right to opacity, particularity and interiority.

Indeed, it's hard to ignore that both of the texts emerge out of a structure of systematic creativity, where the biographical aspects of the authors, as well as their history of migration, seem to have encouraged particular readings of the text that are concentrated on the place of identity within globalisation. But how do the texts mobilise the forces of globality? Both *We Need New Names* and *Voice of America* bear the inscription of their author's position within the networks of globality, and their trajectories can be charted along parallel lines. This biographical detail will deepen our understanding of the very circuits through which these writers becomes visible. On the one hand, there is Elizabeth Zandile

Tshele (1981), who changed her name to NoViolet Bulwayo. Her adopted name, in honour of the memory of her late mother, Violet, is prefixed with the ablative 'No' 'which' in Ndebele – the author's mother tongue – means 'with'. She is, therefore, with Violet, or belonging to Violet, complementing her actual origin, the city of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, with its complicated history of ethnic politics that have been represented in other narratives as somewhat disadvantaged in comparison to the country's capital, Harare (Ndlovu 2).[18] She also holds three Master of Arts degrees, one of which is in English Literature from the Texas A&M University-Commerce, as well as a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Cornell University respectively. In addition, Bulwayo was recognised in 2011 for her short story "Hitting Budapest" which won her the Caine Prize for African Writing and ushered in a career by a string of Creative Writing Programmes in elite U.S. universities. Moreover, the prize paved the path for the critical acclaim of her debut novel, *We Need New Names*, which was an intensification of the short story which had fewer than twenty-four months prior received the Caine Prize. Indeed, the novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2013, thus making Bulawayo the first African woman to have been shortlisted for the prize.[19]

On the other hand, Epaphras Chukwuenweniwe (E.C.) Osondu, is a Nigerian-born writer who now lives in the United States. Unlike Bulawayo's trajectory, Osondu moved to the United States much later in his life, having worked as a copywriter in Nigeria for many years. The author is also, not unusually, a graduate of the Masters in Creative Writing Program at Syracuse University in New York. However, the striking similarity between Osondu and Bulawayo lies primarily in the trajectory of their careers. That is, like Bulawayo, Osondu's recognition was also bolstered by his receiving the Caine Prize, in 2009, for his short story entitled "Waiting". Similarly, the prize for Osondu also precipitated the publication of his debut book, *Voice of America*, which is a collection of short stories thematically related in one way or another to the concerns of the awarded "Waiting" which had just twenty-four months prior been recognised as the best piece of writing emerging from an African writer. Certainly, for Osondu, again in the same vein as Bulawayo, his recognition spurred a number of writing residencies from top-tier universities in the United States,

[18] Significantly, this is also the site of Gukhurahundi, an ethnic cleansing campaign carried out in post-liberation Zimbabwe by Zanu-PF which saw Shona speaking people clash against people living in Matabeleland – Bulawayo. This remains a repressed history in present day Zimbabwe; in a sense, *We Need New Names* makes a gesture to this history.

[19] For a detailed description of the commodified systemic creativity of contemporary African literature, see the Wanjiru Doseline Kiguru's *Prizing African Literature: Awards and Cultural Value (*2016).

rendering him a somewhat peripatetic contemporary voice in the migrant writing scene of these U.S. based MFAs.

It is fortuitous, finally, that both Bulawayo's and Osondu's literary trajectories owe much to their consecration within the U.S. higher education system, since it is there that they cultivate and refine their literary and stylistic sensibilities. As such, the institution is the career making moment that facilitates their ascendance as contemporary African migrant writers to be taken seriously by the various valuing communities in Euro-America. It is, in significant part, these conditions of possibility that inform the subject of McGurl's 2009 book, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*, which charts the trajectory of fiction coming out of the U.S. since the end of World War II through to the present day, and argues that it can only be understood in relation to the rise of mass higher education in the U.S., particularly the Master in Creative Writing Program.[20] Although the book has to do with American writers who, in one way or another, have an affiliation with institutions dedicated to Creative Writing Programs, both Bulawayo and Osondu, despite their origins and position of migrancy, are very much a part of that systematising programme whose implications I will briefly outline, before offering a complementary reading of the texts.

McGurl's concern is with the way in which the 'patronage' of the university, over time, has come to recognise literature and to function as a canonising force in literary domains. Quite importantly, he insists that this patronage has implications not only at the moment of textual production, but also in the ways readers respond to sanctioned members of this throughput system. With the institution as primary influencer, we come upon a contention: is it not contradictory to speak of a manufactured creativity, or a systematic creativity, when we consider the influences of the MFA on African migrant writers and their work? The strange logic of this syntagma generates a complex inventory of aesthetic tensions which have to do with the double bind that must be negotiated.

Indeed, the selectively permeable gate-keeping institutions, insofar as they are open to a small number of 'minority' students from outside the U.S., are themselves an example of the globalising effects of market capitalism's world reach. Part of what makes these writers 'global', and thus considered within the parameters of 'world literature', is precisely their

[20] McGurl is a Stanford University professor. Therefore, his book itself demonstrates the social capital that is accrued to members of particular institutions of higher learning. By invoking McGurl's institutional affiliation, a top research American university with an enviable reputation, we enact an anxiety of affiliation. Ironically, McGurl himself, in a book about institutional patronage, does not acknowledge his own folded-togetherness with the very structure he critiques.

ability to permeate such fossilising spaces as the Creative Writing Program especially *as minority subjects*. It's also clear that the institution has serviceability for writers, since "colleges and universities are now the central conservators of modernist literary value as such, and they are where most "serious writers" (of which there is now an oversupply) and "serious readers" (of which there can never be enough) are trained" (x). What must be emphasised is that, often, literature that emerges out of the influence of the institution not only reflects a certain subject position, but that this reflection is also manifested in a number of ways that can be traced textually (x). It is precisely such influence of the institution which might explain why, interestingly, when asked about his reason behind *Voice of America*'s form, the short story, Osondu mentions that it is "because I teach creative writing. Short stories are really the staple of creative writing courses" (Osondu para. 1). Ultimately, the problem with fiction emerging in contemporary times, under the umbrellas of the Creative Writing Programs, has been how to "adapt modernist principles of writing, developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries well outside the academy, to a literary field increasingly dominated by bureaucratic institutions of higher education" (McGurl x). In thinking about African migrant writers, we could add to this problem the pressure, from the market, of having to satisfy the rubrics of publishing corporations, neatly outlined in Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001), and closely related to the ghost of the ethnographic imperative of the double bind.

Of course, a plethora of other phenomena have occurred by the time the writer reaches the ivory tower in which systematic creativity is harnessed; she would typically have had a number of other teachers or models, as well as numerous interactions and encounters with peers that no doubt "generate an influential social atmosphere" that itself influences what the individual writer produces (McGurl 322). Yet, it is not uncommon to find critical voices of Creative Writing Programs "sneering", as McGurl writes, 'that so-and-so is such an "Iowa writer," so "Brown," so "Syracuse"—as though the mere attribution of institutionality is enough to disqualify the work" (322). But, as in the case of the two texts here, the very idea of institutionalisation privileges the texts; it functions as a type of certification that encourages us to embrace them. While some writers squirm at the idea of their own institutionalisation, if only to avoid foregone conclusions about their literary output, Bulawayo and Osondu seem more prepared to embrace institutionalisation.

It is at the level of the institution that "the Program Era becomes an occasion" for what, recalling Harold Bloom, McGurl calls the "anxiety of influence" (321). Accordingly, the institution is an important part of the cultural capital of the two contemporary African

migrant writers, with a certification of their graduation, and thus affiliation, always emphasised. Whether in introductory remarks at book readings, or on the blurb at the back of their books, the biographical detail already frames the event of reading the contemporary African migrant text, just as the institutional affiliation establishes certain readerly assurances. We thus begin to see a tri-folded relationship between: the socio-political backgrounds of the authors, the institutions of higher education that come to consecrate them, and, finally, how their negotiation of their structural interpellation or the play of the double bind, takes shape in the texts.

'Damned if you do, damned if you don't!'

Bulawayo's novel enacts the double bind of African migrant writing in a didactic way. Set in two locations, a devastated shanty town ironically called 'Paradise', situated in an unnamed country in Southern Africa, *We Need New Names* is a *Bildungsroman* that charts the life of a ten-year-old girl, Darling, whose family is internally displaced and rendered subaltern, following the intense political turmoil in her country. Whether it is the unforgiving socio-economic environment, or the white farmers forcibly repatriated from the land they were occupying, to the scores of educated people now forced to take up manual and menial labour in neighbouring South Africa simply to survive, it is clear that although the country is not named as such, the author is making reference to her homeland, Zimbabwe. And since the novel is ultimately about mobility, the other setting, different in its poverty, but nonetheless unhomely, is Kalamazoo, Michigan, where Darling seeks refuge as an undocumented immigrant, while coming to terms with the disillusionment of the American dream. With the novel's two localities divided, it remains unclear exactly how Darling ends up in the United States, but she finds herself there unwittingly confronted by the various social impediments that migrants face in the United States; never able to return home out of fear of being denied re-entry because of having overstayed her welcome on a tourist visa. In this way, the novel's transnationalism gestures towards borders and boundaries imposed upon people in the global economy.

Darling is also the first person narrator, providing a childlike perspective on the world she observes and, being childlike, finds difficulty in expressing the abstract phenomena that underscores her experiences in the United States, that is, the discourse of cultural cosmopolitanism which often conceals the machinations of state power and global capitalism. And while Bulawayo's critique in *We Need New Names* focuses on material implications in both Zimbabwe and the U.S., the novel seems hesitant to engage the abstract universality of

globality, and holds off on interiority when it does not serve the urgency and immediacy of the author's animus. For instance, throughout the novel it is clear that Darling, her friends and the people in Paradise more generally, wish to escape the political situation in Zimbabwe. However, the novel's unannounced transition midway through, from the Zimbabwean context to the American, means that Darling cannot engage the particularities of the African migrant's encounter with the border, nor can she account for the policed frontier, as it were, and its relationship to globality. This bill will be paid by the mature narrator, who can afford the complexity of articulating African migrant subjecthood to some degree of particularity.

We Need New Names has also been read as a novel which possesses transformative powers. Pier Paolo Frassinelli (2015) suggests that its primary import lies in its ability to "alert[…] us to the precarity and vulnerability of the mobile identities and communities shaped by the experience of migration" (714). Meanwhile, Shirin Edwin insists that Bulawayo's "Hitting Budapest", the first episode of the novel which she likewise reads alongside Osondu's award winning short-story "Waiting", are useful because they "develop a supplementary critique" (2016) to the iterations that theorise globalisation as having to do with macroeconomic phenomena. Related to that, and on the novel's relationship to cosmopolitanism, mobility and abjection, Anna-Leena Toivanen finds the novel a great demonstration of "abjection [as] a condition that marks the crisis of the postcolonial African nation-state" (14) and the diaspora. *We Need New Names* has solicited a great deal of commentary from readers and critics alike, and engenders as much criticism as it does praise from the bleachers of world literature. All the same, the criticism itself enacts a concern with the double bind. For instance, writing about the aspects of Bulawayo's form, Isaac Ndlovu maintains that the author "employ[s] fictional techniques that further entrench the stereotypical images that have long been rehearsed about the continent" (3). He insists that the novel is an expression of a trend, one "in which fictional writers, especially migrant ones, have attempted to read and then strive to satisfy the hunger for what can be termed Third World fictio-reality cultural products by the West" (3). As far as this claim is concerned, we will shortly see how an indiscriminate resistance towards the novel solely on that basis may be too parochial, showing little regard for the very double bind to which writers must attend.

Nonetheless, what the statement brings into focus is the exposure of African migrant writing to the very double bind I have been describing. Curiously enough, the embedded contradiction in such a position is demonstrable in Helon Habila's review of the novel in *The Guardian*. "There is a palpable anxiety to cover every "African" topic" he writes, "almost as

if the writer had a checklist made from the morning's news on Africa" (para. 4). Clearly, on the playground of contemporary African migrant writing, Bulawayo cannot sit at the cool table. She is banished for what Habila, another contemporary African migrant writer, takes to be "poverty porn" (para. 7). Interestingly, this banishment is not indiscriminate, since it appears that there are some writers who do get the honour of a seat at the table of ethical representation. Habila's quip in reading *We Need New Names* is, surprisingly, much harsher criticism than the general appreciation and laudatory tone he takes in describing Osondu's text when, reviewing *Voice of America* also in *The Guardian*, he concludes that "Osondu's prose style, with its repetitions and run-ons, is that of the raconteur. It is direct and unmannered, it is inventive and humorous, but above all it is compelling" (para. 8). Habila's strange contradiction here, at best, demonstrates an epistemic limit; to set the matter of subject position aside, merely by invoking the scandalous 'performance of Africa' (his phrase), is to oversimplify the confrontation with the double bind, the folded togetherness of the writer, her reader and the nature of global capital with which I am concerned[21]. Such a dismissal works, at once, to disarm the reader, to leave her ill prepared to enter the protocols of the texts, since it stymies the possibility of finding some countervailing moment in the text, one that bears the signature and trace of a text that negotiates a double bind. Of course, the other accusation to which contemporary African migrant writing is increasingly exposed, has to do with the opposite of poverty porn, the Afropolitan aesthetic that is "so concerned with not telling a single story of poor fly-infested Africans that it goes overboard into the academic halls of Princeton, of mansions, housemaids, and casually worn and perhaps ill-gotten wealth" (Wa Ngugi para. 16). If Bulawayo stands accused of poverty porn, and if (as I will show in subsequent chapters on Selasi and Cole respectively) a cosmo/afropolitan sensibility is sometimes accused of the exact opposite, a strange spectrum is established. Such a spectrum forces Tayie Selasi (in her protest essay against the pigeonholing of African migrant writers) to give voice to precisely this structure of the double bind: "Dammed if you do, dammed if you don't" (para. 16).

If the intellectual fixation on identitarianism forgoes a responsibility to read the compelling implications of the texts through the lens of globality, such a fixation also disavows the function of global capitalism both within the production and the distribution/circulatory processes of the novel. This is one reason to consider the double bind

[21] The language of a 'folded togetherness' as structural to human life is borrowed Mark Sanders' *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (2002).

of African migrant writing as well as the structural ambiguity of migration *prior* to the border crossing moment, focusing instead on the arena of global capitalism that produces the conditions of possibility for the text to emerge in the first place. And so, going back to the question of the institution and its imprint on the life of the writing, already the structuring of both texts in a series of tightly bound short-stories resembles a prevalent pedagogical procedure of the Creative Writing classroom. While Bulawayo's is of course a novel, it could also be read as a series of short stories woven together to produce a novel length offering, so that what we have in the end is a large vignette of Africa, and the African migrant experience.

Frassinelli's illuminating essay on the novel and its relationship with the border as method, offers a more enabling reading of this experience. He understands Bulawayo's text to be problematizing "constructions of identity defined in geographically bounded terms by exploring the heterogeneity, porosity and mobility of the many borders that criss-cross our globalized world" (714). Appropriate to his précis, Frassinelli concludes that *We Need New Names*, because of its strategic handling of the subject of the border, migration and the processes of subject formation attendant with it, "thus has the merit both of providing us with a powerful literary representation of the affective displacements and ruptures that accompany the experience of migration, and of pointing to the possibilities of their reconstitution at the across borders that shape so many precarious lives in our vulnerable and mobile times" (721). Despite his recognition of the role of contemporary global and postcolonial capitalism, Frassinelli does not assess the structural ambiguity of contemporary migration as it relates to the double bind that the novel negotiates, or how such a negotiation might suggest something about the novel's relationship to globality.

Minimalism, Exteriority and Urgency

To concentrate on the exterior perspective that comes with the child narrator in *We Need New Names* returns us to the question of world-making and spirituality. In her essay on the novel and its narrative devices, Robin Wilkinson finds the child narrator to be an appropriate conduit through which to express socio-political issues or the crisis of globality without the self-consciousness that sometimes clouds the better judgment of adults. For Wilkinson, the use of the child narrator in the novel can neatly articulate "themes too large for adult fiction" (124) since children are not "limited by their participation in social, cultural and ideological institutions and discourses", thus giving them the ability to "infringe the taboos of society, cross the adult-shame frontier, and penetrate emotional danger zones" (126). But what are the contours of this 'emotional danger zone'? Wilkinson reads the novel with a focus on

Bulawayo's use of humour, which is befitting of the child narrator's innocent voice, to demonstrate how the author uses the child narrator to broach the subject of postcolonial uneven development and corrupt governmentality. But the child narrator's humour can only go so far, hesitant to provide detail in the moments when one would expect it to interiorise, or at least particularise, African migrant subject formation.

In one scene, for instance, Darling observes a church congregation in Paradise where, driven by an intractable perversion, a rogue priest and village sham – Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro – publicly molests a young woman under the pretence of exorcising a demon. The child narrator recounts this in a dispassionate matter of fact tone, emotionally detached from the scene of her observation. At a church event during which this incident takes place, Pastor Mborro's voice is described as one which, if it were an animal, "would be big and fierce and would knock things down […] thundering about Judas and Golgotha and the cross and the two thieves next to Jesus and things, making like he was there and saw it all" (35). He insists that people pay him large sums only in dollars, if the blessings and prayers he is requested to bestow are to materialise. His dubious and questionable ways are here exposed in a way stripped of ornamentation, portraying him as a two-dimensional character, where one can imagine that a more furnished account would, for instance, stage a commentary on the colonial grammar of religiosity among subaltern populations of Zimbabwe, or better still, attend to the particular details of this tragic moment, the exact place of this scene within globality. Thus, the astonishing absurdity of having to make a down payment for your prayers and desires, which is a precept in the lives of many people across the global south world, is left unexplored. Indeed, it is such instances which require the leap from merely the observation of phenomena in the perspective of the child, to the particularising voiceover of a mature narrator.

Be that as it may, a reading alongside the market reveals how the crisis of globality already bears on the character's lives in the homeland, long before Darling moves to the U.S. This deliberately minimalist perspective may risk flattening the discourse of globality in its reliance on an "unsophisticated register" which, according to Wilkinson's article on the novel's narrative style, "cuts to the quick of complex issues which are articulated in simplified terms" (125). But, we could ask, why should readers be pacified into reading Africa? As I have been arguing, Bulawayo's use of the child narrator (and hence exteriority) that is necessitated by an urgency cannot give us an interior since, through Darling's observations, we are presented not with the personal, psycho-spiritual, but with the macro-political.

Having said that, we can also, of course, take the gap between the child narrator's perceptions and the reader's perceptions, to be eliciting a kind of dramatic irony, which would allow precisely for a reading alongside the market. If we allow for the gap between narrator and reader to engender an intended dramatic irony, then Darling can, for instance, expose us to some of the movements of the international civil society and the humanitarian aid provided by global do-gooders. Her limited perspective is fit for the purpose of Bulawayo's aims, as in the scene in which Darling's at-hand observation shows up the shallowness of the international civil society. The entire scene is reminiscent of what Joseph Slaughter in his essay "The Enchantment of Human Rights; or, What Difference does Indifference Make?" refers to as "humanitarianism as *sentimental* identification with suffering others", which by itself, the novel suggests, is not enough to effect change (emphasis added 51). In that light, earlier in the novel, one of Darling's friends, Bastard, is said to have "black tracksuit bottoms and a faded orange T-shit that says Cornell" (12) given to him by an alumnus of the school working for an NGO. But, later in the novel, when "the NGO people" give Darling "a T-shirt with the word *Google* at the front, plus a red dress that is tight at the armpits," (55) at that very moment, the act of bequeathing random items to subaltern subjects, cannot be understood outside of the contradictory nature of the border which will be picked up by the more mature narrator in the border chapters. The contradiction of the border can be characterised thus: it is permeable only to data and capital and to citizens of the superpower, but remains a policed *frontier* for the subaltern populations in the global South.

We begin to see how a reading alongside the market exposes the plunder of global capitalism. While the novel uses the lexicon of the calamitous situation 'in Africa', it seems also to have a lot to say about the global South's connection to Euro-America within the milieu of globalisation, in which cheap migrant labour that is organised along racial and gendered taxonomies is unstoppably proliferate. Along with the child narrator, Bulawayo chooses the border or, more accurately, the frontier as the main organising device that signals the zones of instability with which she is concerned. However, when it comes to accessing the interiority of those who are submitted to the decree of global capitalism, she cannot rely on Darling as the child narrator. For good or for bad, Darling can only enumerate the miseries and devastating conditions of her homeland and adopted homeland, but she cannot travel on the terrain of interiority or spirituality, where she might, perhaps, approach the abstract cords of her subjecthood or the unverifiable and irreducible phenomena of the social bonds in

which humans enter. Alas, she remains with the burden of giving voice to an urgency.

A countervailing interiority and the mature narrator

If the child narrator as a device is intended to elicit dramatic irony, Bulawayo seems fully aware that this device comes with some limitations, and may need to be updated from time to time. For that reason, interiority *does* find accommodation in the narrative, except not in the character of Darling. The task of abstraction is outsourced. To handle thematic abstraction, which deepens a reading of exteriority, again alongside the market, Bulawayo relies on the third person plural perspective of a *mature* unnamed narrator who, by giving poetic descriptions of the charged frontiers and the implications thereof, disrupts the narrative thread and augments the novel's childlike or adolescent perspective. Of all the eighteen chapters of the novel, the omniscient mature narrator appears three times in pentavalent sequence, each time clearly designed to offer an affirming echo to the otherwise attenuated child voice. Here, Bulawayo negotiates the double bind and, recognising the limiting competency of the child, offers a supplement to her exterior perspective. The fifth chapter, "How They Appeared" is a lyricism on the first (and domestic) border crossing, when Darling and her family are displaced and relocated to Paradise after the Zimbabwean government's Operation Murambatsvina ("Move the Rubbish" or Operation Restore Order) which purportedly sought to clear slums across the country, displacing close to one million people nationwide[22].

Yet again, in the tenth chapter, "How They Left" the anxiety of the border is spiritualised, rendered in rhythmical and poetic prose that would belie the simplicity of Darling's perspective, but that must nevertheless buttress her narrative potential. The chapter concerns the moment of self-alienation from the homeland, describing the intense movement across the globe at the height of the Zimbabwean financial crisis, which came at a high price for those fortunate enough to realise the dream of an escape. Finally, the sixteenth chapter, "How They Lived", attends most directly to the double bind and gives way to the surge of particularity and spirituality that had been systematically supressed by the child narrator. Here is a counterpoint to the child narrator, something akin to a Greek chorus of African elders, humming a supplementary interiority, lyrically unfolding the particularity of the suppressed detail. This segment is the longest of the three mature-narrator chapters, and

[22] See, for instance, Richard Bourne's Catastrophe: *What Went Wrong in Zimbabwe?* (2011, Zed Books).

presents a countervailing moment where something of an interiority emerges, picks up the baton from Darling, that is, picks up the excesses of an exteriority necessitated by urgency, and invites the narrative sequence to a spiritual dance to the music of the interior, the novel's express attempt to get at the consciousness of African migrants.

Here, the adult narrator details the disillusionment and pain of those who have had to give up their lives, their loved ones, their memories and traditions in the homeland, in order to gain a chance at a decent life worth living in the adopted homeland. The narrator questions whether America is "that wretched place where they took looted black sons and daughters those many, many years ago", where she now finds herself "in the footsteps of those black sons and daughters" (241), yoked to their memory and history, but still unable connect with their past, to throw a communicative cable to 'the accentors'. The mature narrator describes the pain of globality while suggesting that her pain cannot be understood within the dominant discursive and institutional practices of bourgeois American society:

> Because we were not in our country, we could not use our own languages, and so when we spoke our voices came out bruised. When we talked, our tongues thrashed madly in our mouths, staggered like drunken men. Because we were not using our languages we said things we did not mean; what we really wanted to say remained folded inside, trapped. In America we did not always have words. It was only when we were by ourselves that we spoke in our real voices. When we were alone we summonsed the horses of our languages and mounted their backs and galloped past skyscrapers. (240)

This moving articulation of the plight of the unmoored is an example of texture that depends on a mature narrator, and, moreover, the device is operative at meta-thematic level. We can imagine that that which "we really wanted to say" that "remained folded inside, trapped", is the mature narrator's reflection on the limitations that Darling's point of view entails, and how it cannot speak a spiritual language of history and subjecthood, the language that is, here, assumed by the mature narrator. The narrator later laments that even after death, the spiritual lives of African migrants will continue to be haunted by the chaos of the world: "we will leave for the land of the dead naked, without the things we need to enter the castle of our ancestors. Because we will not be proper, the spirits will not come running to meet us, and so we will wait and wait – forever waiting in the air like flags of unsung countries" (250). The novel, here, raises questions about the grievability of subaltern life and what makes it a life

worth grieving in the first place. All the same, the sense of yearning for a past (pastoral) utopia is so palpable that the passage ends up articulating something of a nostalgia which, as Toivanen writes, "conveys a profoundly contradictory idea of nationhood as violent and repulsive, but simultaneously attractive in its communal aspects" (8). Darling as the child narrator is denied access to precisely such communal aspects which can be ironed out only in detail. For this reason, the mature narrator speaks in the voice of a collective consciousness, the "we" that "recalled the tatters of our country left behind, barely held together by American dollars, by monies from other countries" (243). More important, in all three border segments narrated by the mature narrator, the border is not simply symbolic of the markers of linguistic and socio-cultural difference. With its sonic composition and somewhat more spiritual inflection, the chapter requires us to approach it with an allegorical ear so that, for instance, the novel's commentary on language is understood to be a meditation on the socio-political world, but from within the register of the unverifiable, where readerly imagination is activated.

On the globality scoresheet, the novel ranks highly for its use of the frontier to stage what Gayatri Spivak calls the "performative contradiction of borderless capital" (Spivak, *Readings* 5). Indeed, the usefulness of the border in this chapter lies precisely in the fact that it entails an embedded contradiction of global capitalism since, on the one hand, people are bordered subjects, but on the other hand, capital and data move unrestricted, transcending the very borders that it requires to maintain itself (*Readings* 11). We can say, capital crosses borders, but African migrants cross frontiers, a far less smooth-running machine than the borders that maintain the pumped vitality of capital. Now, reduced to the status of illegality, and within American poverty, Darling finds herself working as a housecleaner for one of her aunt's wealthy bosses. Echoing this theme of undocumented migrant labour, the mature narrator says (again able to access a collective consciousness) "we dropped our heads because we were no longer people, we were now illegals" (242), referring to the scores of immigrants from various global south countries, all hopelessly subjected to the contradiction of global capitalism, which creates the conditions for cheap migrant labour, but must give meaning to the border, and so deports thousands just to keep the system of migrant labour operating. Indeed, Spivak captures just this when she says that "[c]apital cannot let go of massively underpaid labour with no workplace safety or benefit requirement" before declaring that "undocumented immigrant labour is the new subaltern social group" (*Readings* 11). Darling's case is one example among many, of the idea that "capital needs to keep soft currency soft. Labour must therefore cross frontiers, not borders, undercover, where hard

currency beckons" (11). Soft currency is, of course, the conditions of possibility for migrant labour; it drives speculative economics, which in the process establishes the global south as the source of Euro-American cheap migrant labour.[23] Accordingly, the mature narrator instrumentalises the border, so that it stands for the zones of instability of globality:

> Those with nothing are crossing borders. Those with strength are crossing borders. Those with ambition are crossing borders. Those with hopes are crossing borders. Those with loss are crossing borders. Those in pain are crossing borders. Moving, running, emigrating, deserting, walking, quitting, flying, fleeing – to all over, to countries near and far, to countries unheard of, to countries whose names they cannot pronounce. They are leaving in droves. (145)

The novel's structure itself has a strong reliance on the border, with "How They Left" as that which serves to reify the separation of the novel into two halves of nearly identical length, the first set in Zimbabwe and the other in the United States. In this way, the border functions both to dis-connect as well as to re-connect and thereby forces us to see the two imagined worlds as constituting one whole. We see this, for instance, much earlier in the novel when the more nefarious qualities of the global market in Zimbabwe are exposed. In a scene that appears in the Zimbabwean setting, long before her sudden departure to the U.S., Darling encounters internal frontiers where, as Frassinelli writes, "the polysemy and multiplicity of borders are brought into view by repeated crossings and reconfigurations of a social space marked by an accumulation of geographical signifiers" (715). Indeed, Darling and her friends, Chipo, Bastard, Godknows, and Stina, traverse the socio-geographical space of their neighbouring towns, from their backyard in the township of Paradise, whose residents go for days without a morsel of food, to the aptly named Budapest, whose wealthy residents never go Hung(a)ry. The European city of Budapest finds a catachrestic meaning in the context of Paradise, where just a few miles away, the Africa-China relations as they manifest themselves in the Zimbabwean setting become apparent.

Such international or free market relations are represented by rapid corporate construction and development programmes that involve the highest foreign direct investment programmes in Zimbabwe, all emanating from China, which is quietly waiting in the wings

[23] Soft currency is defined as "the money of a country that is expected to drop in value relative to other countries" typically from the smaller and weaker states.

as the Mugabe regime pushes Euro-American capitalism off centre-stage, preparing to bring in a new era of Sino-Africa relations. In the novel, this phenomenon is metonymised by a town called Shanghai. The town gets its name not because it has an overwhelming Chinese demographic, but because of the flows of capitalist driven investment in the area where "machines hoist things in terrible jaws, machines maul the earth […] Chinese men are all over the place in orange uniforms and yellow helmets" and while "there's not that many of them, you'd think they are a field of corn" (42). Meanwhile, the local Zimbabwean men from Paradise, who themselves have to cross a type of domestic border to get to Shanghai which is "on the other side of the quarry, separated by a bush" (43), represent the collateral damage of the scandal of global capitalism, and the global division of labour. The Chinese contractors work alongside "the black men, who are working in regular clothes –torn T-shirts, vests, shorts, trousers cut at the knees, overalls, flip-flops, tennis shoes" (43).

Shanghai, incidentally, is also the backdrop against which Darling and her friends decide to play one of their innovative games, 'Country Game', in which the children literally weigh up the profitability of countries based on their Gross Domestic Production. Before they play their game, against the backdrop of the rapidly emerging shopping mall being built by the Chinese developers, Darling and her friends go cap in hand to the Chinese worker to ask exactly what the unfinished but hurriedly developing structure will be; "A school? Flats? A clinic?" probes Stina, to which the man replies, "We build you a big big mall. All nice shops inside, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Versace, and so on so on. Good mall, big […]" despite the fact that those to whom he is speaking are structurally removed from the networks of global capital (46). That such a scene, in which international corporations and by extension the capital they generate are deemed borderless, can exist in the global economy alongside the subaltern subjects who, contrarily, are restricted by borders of various kinds, gestures to the performative contradiction of the borderlessness of capital, and so rightly calls attention to the status of globality. In a similar manner, Meg Samuelson's article about China-in-Africa relations in the era of the Anthropocene, considers the border in *We Need New Names* to be operating in just this way when she avers that between the Mugabe regime, Chinese capital, and the Western multinational corporations, such as Louis Vuitton, that will find their way into the upcoming mall; "China Mall is thus another triangulated space" since "Chinese capital and expertise is constructing on Zimbabwean land with local labour" (8). We have, then, a critique of global capitalism and uneven development in the global economy, where the globe, thanks to the mature narrator, is a totality of politico-spiritual experience and where the global division of labour is one example of the contradiction mentioned above.

In an interesting turn of events, as though life were imitating art, the staging of this contradiction of a borderless capital in *We Need New Names*, anticipates the egregiousness of globality, where speculative economics and the corrosion of democracy would further decimate the Zimbabwean economy in the exact terms of the China-Africa relations that the novel lays bare. Indeed, the neoliberal free market, and its spatial organization of economic activities across the globe, had resulted in Zimbabwe being cut off from international trade organizations by the West, followed by the sudden rise in inflation rates of up to 600% in 2004/5. At that point, Zimbabweans were forced to adopt the U.S. dollar as the official trade currency, with smatterings of the South African rand here and there. But the novel intuits a still more fascinating aspect, that is, the Africa-China relations once again, and China's move to fill in the gap left by the West's excommunication of Zimbabwe. In a related way, the novel becomes something of a literary premonition as, indeed, as recently as December 2015, the Zimbabwean government would announce its plans to adopt the Chinese Yuan as legal tender, in return, apparently, for Zimbabwean debt cancellation after the state had accumulated over 1 billion dollars in low-interest loans from China (*Al-Jazeera Economy* 2015). This gives full credence to Samuelson's assertion that the novel reveals how "China has propped up the Mugabe regime in an irresponsible and self-interested extractive relationship" (6) where the "transactions composing the China-in-Africa relationship cannot be trusted" (6) as the crisis ridden country itself is "being traded for short-lived goods with hidden costs in a deal with the dragon that will finally quash the democratic project launched during decolonization and already under severe internal pressure" from within (8). Bulawayo's depiction of the building of an obsolete mall in a Zimbabwean town known as Shanghai, by Chinese economies of agglomeration, prefiguring the real-life situation that would unfold in the name of 'mutual exchange' in the China-Africa relations, bespeaks precisely the contradiction of a borderless capital that I have outlined above.

This contradiction is itself a condition of possibility which allows Bulawayo to situate her character in two nation states, a global superpower and a global south country in crisis. The illustration in the novel is clear; the landscape of the first part of the novel is in a "marginal, poverty-stricken corner of the planet" but that same marginal corner is "traversed by global cultural flows and geopolitical signifiers with which the children are uncannily familiar" (Frassinelli 716). Of course, the exteriority of the child narrator alone cannot offer us more insights about the finer processes or the cunning machinations of global capitalism as they are felt in the private and singular lives of those most affected by its brutish social fracturing. The limitations of the child narrator can only go so far as to offer an assemblage of freeze

images of Africa, what Du Bois would call "stilled artificial black folk" without fully etching out the moving details of the consequences of subalternity.

There are other ways of understanding the critique of globality in the novel, but to the extent that Darling can only list a long inventory of a life of poverty in Zimbabwe, devoid of the personal and collective historicity, *We Need New Names* seems to broach the subject of Africa as though it were simply a matter of postcolonial fact, as though no supranational stakeholders are at play in setting to work the transnational operation of capital and the border. The children can only observe the space, emotionally distanced from that which they observe. If we are reading for dramatic irony, which would indicate that the children are not as emotionally distanced as they appear to be, the price to pay for the narrative technique is taxing, as it frustrates the possibility of voicing the emotional and dispositional dimension of the particularity that they observe. They do, however, visualise it "as a *striated* space" which is "cut across by the borders that correspond to the extreme inequalities that not only make some countries more desirable than others, but that also turn some of [those] countries into no countries at all, subspecies of countries" (Frassinelli 716). In Darling's description of the country game, we see her awareness of subalternity, an awareness that uneven development exists, and that it frames the lives of those considered subaltern. But this awareness alone does not come with an access to a type of consciousness, or a meditation of the place of human experience within globality. In the children's country game:

> Everybody wants to be certain countries, like everybody wants to be the U.S.A. and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and Greece and them. These are the country-countries. If you lose the fight, then you must have to settle for countries like Dubai, South Africa and Botswana and Tanzania and them. They are not country-countries, but at least life is better than here. Nobody wants to be rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia, like Iraq, like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even this one we live in – who wants to be a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart? (49)

To an extent, the children are aware that any named country in which 'things fall apart', and especially their country, is not simply troubled by issues of governmentality and corruption, but is at the behest of an exterior force (Gross Domestic Product, Lifestyle Survey Measurement and various permutations of global capitalism) that relegates countries to subspecies of countries. This is why Samuelson can conclude that, because of something like

a minimalist style, "the novel exposes its own inability to give shape to the story of a shifting geopolitical order" (9) while at the same time, stating that a scene such as the above is "a profound recognition of the ways in which finance capitalism maintains Euro-American hegemony in an apparently multipolar order through the value invested in good" (9). Once again, it seems only a mature figure can carry the work of abstraction. To that end, the tragic-comedic figure of Mother of Bones, and her intuition of globality, offers a different, if more accurate, perspective of the global inequalities at play in the configuration of economic globalisation and its subalternising effects. Mother of Bones owns a briefcase in which she keeps her "bricks of money" (24), devaluated Zimbabwean dollars. Much to her agony, she doesn't "understand how this very money that [she] [has] in lumps cannot buy even a grain of salt" (24). The old woman has a different relationship to capital and abstract value than the protagonist. Darling thinks to herself that "old money […] [is] useless now" and that the only thing one can do with it is to "throw it away or use it to make fire like everybody else" (25). She is aware of her economic environment, noting how "[n]ow they say we'll start using American money" (25). In the end, Mother of Bones' refusal to make a pyre of the devalued bricks of Zimbabwean currency stashed underneath her bed is, really, a form of resistance. As Polo Belina Moji writes, the act of holding onto a vanishing present betrays "an inability to accept her current location – socially, economically and politically" so that she is "actively performing her sense of displacement" (186).

So far, I have focused on the narratological limitations of Bulawayo's text and have hinted, however provisionally, at the potentialities of the narrative strategy as it relates to writing about Africa. Of course, the novel is also set in America, and there, too, it brings in high ratings for its ability to communicate the crisis of global capitalism. If we grant the hermeneutic value of a reading alongside the market, it is important to ask exactly how the novel stages a commentary on global capitalism. Nonetheless, this is surely not to say that contemporary African migrant writing should be suspicious of the child narrator as a device for communicating the complexities of African subjecthood. Nor is it to suggest that, in and of itself, the child narrator cannot have interiority and spirituality in contemporary African migrant literature. There are indeed numerous examples of a successful deployment of the child narrator in African literature.[24] Nonetheless, Bulawayo's child narrator, even where she

[24] I'm thinking here of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) as an obvious precursor and intertext; the untrustworthy narrator of Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1993) and – perhaps most famously – Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991).

is clearly intended to elicit dramatic irony, cannot give us interiority, and this has everything to do with the novel's minimalist technique. In the last instance, *We Need New Names* is not a children's book, but is instead, adult fiction. In order to understand Bulawayo's child narrator, readers must first recall that adult fiction as facilitated by children is merely "based on a contradiction" which purports to "be about children when it is really about adults who figure the children for their own purposes as a space where the anxieties of adulthood can be held at bay" (Odhiambo 267).

Recall, also, that Cheah's radical intervention about what constitutes a world proper, invites us to think of the role of global capitalism, it deleterious effects, and the ways in which it incorporates peoples and populations "into the world-system by tethering them to Western modernity's unrelenting march of progress and capitalist time" all the while "violently destroying other worlds and their temporalities" (19). Cheah mentions that "attempts to characterise contemporary literature as cosmopolitan on the basis of the global character of literary production, circulation and style only lead to a facile cosmopolitanism devoid of a normative force" (19). To that extent, the novel demonstrates the contradiction of global capitalism (the borderlessness of capital needing to keep borders alive in order to thrive), by invoking it throughout the novel, but particularly in the sections of the mature narrator. However deftly *We Need New Names* may deploy the child narrator's exteriority, the novel also tends to subordinate the psychological intensities, the spiritual minutiae of the African migrant condition vis-à-vis global capitalism. In thinking about *We Need New Names* and the question of the double bind, its negotiation of it, the novel runs a commendable race on the track field of world literature. But, with the project of interiority benched, the novel is ultimately denied its victory lap, teetering at the finish line of the more normative world.

Voice of America and writing Africa

If Darling's perspective is necessarily minimalist, the characters in Osondu's *Voice of America* have a similar burden— that of conveying urgency. As mentioned in Chapter One, the force of 'world literature' is determined by its posture towards alternative temporalities, and it is "an active power of world making that contests the world made by capitalist globalisation" whereupon "world literature is reconceived as a site of processes of worlding and as an agent that participates and intervenes in these processes" (Cheah 303). Osondu's chosen narrative form, the African short story, is intended to offer readers a sense of the ordinary, everyday lives of Africans, as well as their social conditions. The book was expected to "provide a window on contemporary realities in Africa and on African

experience" (Wilson-Tagoe 60), as one of the 2006 Caine Prize judges, Nana Wilson-Tagoe, has said about the nature of stories deemed worthy of the prize. Osondu's award-winning story, in particular, is praised by another judge, Nana Yaa Mensah, for being a "deeply moving narrative" that is "sparse" and, because of that "it is powerfully written with not an ounce of fat on it" (Flood 3). For Mensah, Osondu is successful in describing "from a child's point of view, the dislocating experience of being a displaced person" (Flood para 3). The very first story in Osondu's collection, the award-winning "Waiting", is set in a refugee camp in an unnamed African country, and follows the lives of a number of boys living in the camp, jostling each other for food while waiting to be adopted by Euro-American families. The story is one snapshot among many that attempts to capture the various dimensions of, if you like, an 'African subjecthood'.

Osondu employs similar tropes to Bulawayo, reverberating with the trope of subaltern suffering to be found in *We Need New Names*. Where the novel's children are intended to elicit dramatic irony, a showing up of the shallowness of the international civil society, for instance, Osondu likewise communicates the spurious nature of the international civil society within global capitalism. The story "Waiting" exploits the irony of the misplaced names that are printed on the refugee boy's T-shirts, given to them by international NGOs. The narrator's tone is testimonial: "My name is Orlando Zaki" reads the very first sentence of the collective, as we are introduced to the displaced protagonist who, in the succeeding sentence, explains: "Orlando is taken from Orlando, Florida, which is what is written on the T-shirt given to me by the Red Cross" (Osondu 1). It is clear from the start of the story that a significant injustice has occurred, necessitating the narrative testimony set in the camp in the first place. Osondu's stories are written in a mechanical and realist rhetoric, with very little reliance on the type of intermittent lyrical or poetic cadences to be found in Bulawayo's novel. *Voice of America* adds a decidedly dry tenor to its minimalism, which works well for the author's desire to produce a kind of panoramic view of Africa and of African (migrant) subjecthood. In Osondu's book, a series of splintered still shots of Africa are organised around the same exteriority to be found in Bulawayo's narrative technique, a kind of yielding to an urgency. In "Waiting", it quickly emerges that the prevalence of the naming practice in the refugee camp is intended to have an affective appeal: "My friends in the camp are known by the inscriptions written on their T-shirts. Acapulco wears a T-shirt with the inscription "Acapulco." Sexy's T-shirt has the inscription "Tell Me I'm Sexy." Paris's T-shirt says "See

Paris and Die", so that even when the children receive new shirts, they retain the name associated with their initial donation (1).[25]

Moreover, the refugee camp is constantly in a precarious position since, one has to deduce, the story is set against the backdrop of civil unrest or conflict, during which the Red Cross is obstructed from carrying out its functions because "the enemy will not let their plane land" (5). The story does not offer any detail about the particular political milieu within which this villainous figure exists, or what the factors that led to this condition could be. "Waiting" can thus be understood, at a certain hermeneutic level, to suggest that what is more pressing than a concern with detail and particularity, is to articulate that such an enemy exists in the first place. And since the Red Cross aid is not forthcoming, the boys hunt and kill emaciated stray dogs "and use them to make pepper soup" in order to survive (5). Osondu paints something of a Hobbesian state of nature, where the conditions at the refugee camp are so dire that they create an inevitable scramble for the limited resources provided by the aid givers: "We wait for the food trucks to come and then we form a straight line and then we wait a few minutes for the line to scatter, then we wait for the fight to begin, and then we fight and struggle and bite and kick and curse and tear and grab and run" (2). On the occasions when they do get their food, the children's plates at the refugee camp are never washed, Orlando informs us, "because we had already licked them clean with our tongues" (10). Life in this unnamed location in Africa is so brutish that "whenever a child squatted down to shit […] the dogs would come running", so as to "wait for the child to finish and lick the child's buttocks clean before they ate the shit" (5). Now, it is not the subject matter with which the reader should be concerned; the African migrant writer is of course at liberty to document these unliveable conditions through whichever narrative moves serve his project. Nonetheless, having chosen to work with subalternity, it is the negotiation of the double bind that will determine whether or not the chosen subject matter has been adequately dealt with. And so, the dogs, emaciated as they are, are said to have been "as tough as lions" which account for a time when, "one day", the child narrator informs us:

> A little child was squatting and having a shit. When the mother looked up, a half dozen of the dogs that had disappeared emerged from nowhere and attacked the little

[25] Recall too that the trope of the T-shirt that is donated by Western philanthropists also finds its expression in *We Need New Names*, when the children receive NGO donations. In the novel, however, the dramatic irony is clear. Osondu's text, as we shall shortly see, cannot cash in on the dividends of its investment in minimalism. The capital gains, if we will excuse the pun in the 10 000 pounds Caine Prize, are a short-term return for the task of writing Africa.

> child. While the mother screamed, they tore the child into pieces and fled with parts of the child's body dangling between their jaws (6).

Under these harsh circumstances, the boys spend their days dreaming about an escape to America, where they imagine that a better life awaits. The child narrator serves the author well since, from this pared down perspective, Osondu is able to employ what Dobrota Pucherová calls the "semantics of subalternity" in order to draw up the itinerary of suffering in the text (16). This is also one reason why, immediately following the vicious assail described above, the author silences Zaki's narrative potential by suggesting that the subaltern population subjected to these conditions are disinclined to assess the trauma of their subalternity. "Acapulco told me not to mention it anymore. He said people in the camp did not like talking about the dogs" the narrator says (6), which forecloses any possibility of penetrating the consciousness of those living in this dystopian setting. It seems the text works with the optic of a zoomed out lens, analogous to an out of focus camera in which the background is sharp, while the subjects themselves, although cantered in the picture, remain unfocused and blurred. As a bridging device, therefore, the text requires intertextualities with canonical English works, which explains, for instance, why one of the aid workers, sister Norah, gifts Orlando with an old copy of *Waiting for Godot*. The book is liked by Orlando because "the people in the book are waiting for God to come help them" (2), which resonates with the children's own waiting in vain for messianic deliverance. The story will recall another literary figure, that of Oliver Twist, the classic tale of the destitute boy and his life of poverty, and in which Oliver famously pleads for more food from an under resourced and brutal shelter. Although subjected to poverty of a different kind, the figure of Oliver Twist and the boy's ill-fated life in an orphanage, (even if different to Osondu's characters in that Oliver eventually escapes the hellish orphanage) assists Osondu's text in its affective delivery.

The net effect of this intertextual nod? One answer is that it gives a global readership, crucial for Osondu's animus, a way into the text, and prepares readers for its central concerns, which can be understood through the familiar, and more established literary examples of subalternity in the North Atlantic. This citationality, together with the hybridisation of local words with familiar global references, or names invented by the children, might signal what Pucherová, in her article about the literary implications of the Caine Prize, refers to as "metropolitan cultural tastes" (20). But, if we were to think about the book's response to the injunction of the double bind of contemporary African migrant

writing, a somewhat more ambiguous picture emerges. As we saw with Bulawayo, the author is acted upon by the double bind. So, Osondu is of course aware that the world literature scene in which he is located demands that he answers the call of this double bind, which, against his will, interrupts the event of writing. An unwelcomed call in which, on the other end of the receiver, the ethnographic imperative whispers with two contradictory injunctions; write about the implications of globality, which has obliterated the detail and particularity of the lives most vulnerable to its seemingly unstoppable social fracturing; but in doing so, adopt an a spiritual register, an interiority of soul and consciousness, that recuperates the specificity and particularity of the subjecthood with which you are preoccupied.

Osondu answers this call by using at hand signifiers that stand in for general concepts of subaltern life or those removed from the circuits of upward mobility. Through the reference to Dickens, the author puts his own book in conversation with the classic story, thereby creating an impressionistic scene which is "at once strange and reassuringly familiar" (20) for the Euro-American reader. Perhaps anticipating the cultural capital of his own positionality, his 'authenticity' if you will, Osondu reassures his reader that his story, indeed his book, is the psychic reservoir that contains the various forms of subject formation and collective consciousness in Africa when, in the pages of the sentimental refugee narrative, he stages a telling conversation between two children, Acapulco and Zaki, during which the latter confides in the former about his aversion to the smoke fires that accompany the Red Cross women's cooking. For Zaki, the smoke triggers memories of bullets and gun smoke that he experienced following a traumatic village attack by the militia who routinely massacred "most of [his] people who could not pronounce the name of the rebel leader properly" recalling how "they said we could not say *Tsofo*, we kept saying *Tofo* and they kept shooting us" (7). Eager to assuage his friend's discontent, Zaki tells Acapulco that better days lie ahead: "You will be fine when you get to America. They don't cook with firewood; they use electricity" (6). Now, the following exchange offers what we can take as the writer's own consciousness about the presumed legitimacy of his book, or the gap that he sees it assuming:

> "You know everything, Zaki. How do you know all these things though you have never been to these places?"
> "I read a lot of books – books contain a lot of information. Sometimes they tell stories too – I say". (6)

Despite the fact that Zaki has not seen anything outside this place of abjection, he is confident that books can and do offer insights into other worlds. Importantly, though, the child narrator sees the books as containing, first and foremost, *information*, or data, to which various stories can be added from time to time. This is how the absence of 'fat', commended by one of the prize judges, functions. If Zaki has a rumorological sense of another more just world, facilitated by books, the activation of imagination functions in the reverse, that is, the reader, too, can be imaginatively transported to the situation in Africa, where all its crises are rendered in a plainspoken assemblage of freeze images of Africans that are not by themselves significant, except to the extent that they are the rough and unfocused edges of the greater picture, the socio-political and socio-economic backdrop. In this way, Osondu subtly invites us to think of his book precisely as a psycho-spiritual reservoir, the information book, concerning the collective consciousness of Africa and African subjecthood in general. Of course, in saying this, I am not collapsing the lines between the author's ideas, opinions and beliefs and those of the characters that he creates. Yet, one cannot help but remark on Osondu's strong inclination for relying, again as with Bulawayo, on the first person child perspective in much of the book. Although Osondu's child narrator in "Waiting" seems to have a more unequivocal belief in the transformative powers of America, the story ends with his still wishing to escape his indigent life in the camp, although no American family has expressed interest in adopting him, despite his having taken and sent numerous headshots of his gleeful face, in the hopes that such a family might adopt him.

Of the eighteen short stories with which we are presented, more than a third employ the strategy of the child narrator, recalling what Robinson noted in her essay about Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, that the use of a child narrator, particularly by African writers, works to provide "a point of access to the text for Western readers, who are more easily initiated into the complexities of a foreign culture and its politics through a child's perspective" (125). Although Wilkinson's argument appears to generalise the child narrator in African writing, using Bulawayo as an analogue, I wager that it might bear more strongly on Osondu since he, unlike Selasi, Mengestu or even Cole, all of whom are considered in later chapters, understands himself to be doing representational work for Africa within the globalised world. It is, then, the nature of his claim to representation, perhaps even the conditions of its possibility, that must be assessed. Where other contemporary writers seem to avoid the anxiety of influence, Osondu appears prepared to embrace it, even when it threatens to essentialise him and his artistic modalities. We can trace a long line of contemporary African writers working precisely to avert the binding strictures of literary taxonomy. Many

writers have rejected identification with the unwelcome designation of 'African writer', or the concept of nation-statehood upon which it depends. As the Zimbabwean cult author Dambudzo Marechera once famously asserted: "I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race then fuck you" (Veit-Wild qtd in Pucherová 22). In another context, and as early as 1986, right when the notion of cosmopolitanism within literary studies was beginning to solidify, Marechera expressed his desire for African writing that would 'compete':

> With anything published in New York, in London, in Paris, in Tokyo, and so on. This means bringing up what has already been achieved to the stage where there will no longer be any need to talk about "Zimbabwean literature" or even about "African writing", where literature will simply be international and up to those rigorous standards. (Loyd qtd. in Pucherová 22)

This is an understandable position for someone wishing to rid themselves of the burden of urgency, suspicious that it is devoid of interiority. Indeed Osondu has himself expressed his identification, against the sensibilities of writers such as Selasi and Cole, by avowing his resolutely 'African' writerly positionality and, for him, the artistic authority with which it is coupled. In an interview with Daniel Musiitwa of African Book Club, asked whether and how he feels constrained by certain thematic concerns as a writer of African origin, Osondu responded: "I am unashamedly an African writer" (Musiitwa para 13). He continues:

> I find it weird that some people who have been decorated and garlanded for the simple reason that they are African writers are the ones who want to distance themselves from that tag, for the most part. I find that this is not new- I find that it is mostly marginalized people that try to avoid the tag—back in the day, certain African-American writers did not want to be labelled as Negro Writers. I have never met an American writer who baulked at being called an American writer neither have I met a Greek philosopher who said just call me philosopher. Even the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek is called a Slovenian philosopher. Provenance is important for us as humans whether in identifying our wines, cheese or writers (Musiitwa para 13).

The question posed to Osondu, itself, communicates the double bind. Yet the answer to it, the 'provenance' about which the author speaks, registers something of a capitulation. The positionality of the text, in this case, comes to service the authority of the literary marketplace just as a more insidious epistemic conundrum becomes visible. If the author is to concern himself with his African-ness, his text simultaneously reflects an anxiety to be categorically 'African' which, in its acquiescence to such subject constitution, reifies a contradictory reverse legitimation of colonialism as an organising principal and system. Taking that interpellation , oddly enough, Osondu's rejoinder above, rather than support his commitment to an enabling affiliation, exposes the limitations of an un-strategic ethnification. Surely, the idea that a Slovenian philosopher is named a Slovenian philosopher, rather than a *European* one, is precisely the point! It is not because, in itself, 'African writer' is a type of vulgarity that the other migrant authors reject its aesthetic imposition and contest the epistemic violence of such a designating practice. Of course, the notion of a 'Greek philosopher' is embraced with far less hesitation for the very fact that the country suggests a modicum of particularity regarding the author's positionality; an already facile particularity that would be further effaced, completely, if the Slovenian philosopher were to be called a European philosopher, which he is not.

Indeed the right to particularity, and resistance to structural interpellation , are not accrued to the African migrant writer, who becomes instantly de-particularised such that a "Francophone" writer (anyway, this terms is itself always reserved for African writers, forever different to a "French" writer) from a Muslim majority country, say Senegal, is discursively indistinguishable from a Lusophone writer from a Catholic country such as Angola. This observation finds itself here because, taken together with the injunction of 'urgency', its implications weigh heavily on his child narrator. It's worth repeating in this context that, that the narrative strategies of the author resembles what Odhiambo, writing about the child narrator, in this expressly minimalist sense, has called "a contradiction purporting to be about children" when in reality it is simply "about adults who figure the children for their own purposes as a space where anxieties of adulthood can be held at bay" (267). From this perspective, Zaki's claim that books can offer information about worlds and places beyond one's immediate locale echoes Osondu's own views about the significance of his debut offering, rendered through a somewhat unapologetic claim to an urgency and perhaps, even, 'authenticity'. But how is authenticity, if we are even permitted the illusion of authenticity, useful for Osondu's text if the text does not stage the contradictions of capital in the way Bulawayo's novel does?

Through this complementary reading of Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Osondu's *Voice of America*, we come to understand how, in an attempt to negotiate the double bind of African migrant writing, a text can occupy two ends of the diasporic spectrum. If such a spectrum exists in the way that I have suggested, it is characterised by, on the one hand, a fielding of the call of the double bind, by attending to the spiritual dimension of the African migrant experience, and, on the other hand, a 'global' or market capitalist pressure to fall back on the very minimalist texture that comes with the urgency of exteriority. Staying with the idea of exteriority, in another story, "Bar Beach Show", we are introduced to an adolescent narrator, still under pressure to communicate urgency. From the very first line of the story, the brutality of the state apparatus frames the narrative structure. "The year I turned thirteen, my father took me and my elder brother, Yemi, to Lagos's Bar Beach to witness the death by firing squad of the notorious armed robber Lawrence "The Law" Anini and his gang of seven robbers" (11). Although the narrator locates us in Nigeria from the very first line, it seems where there *is* some potential for particularity, the story is written in such a way as to emphasise the Africanness of the setting, at the expense of subjecthood. The giveaway in this story is located in the numerous geographical markers that appear in the narrative, which aim to legitimate the existence of the brutality about which we read. The Law "only stole from the very rich and from the banks" (11). Yet this detail, because it is left unexamined, reads as patently derived when, in the following sentence, the narrator mentions that "when the police were after him and his gang, he had torn open a bag of naira currency notes and flung fistful after fistful into the air" causing a "stampede as the people on the street ran into the road to pick up the money" (11). From a technical perspective, there is surely no need for the narrator to mention that the money stolen from the banks or the wealthy Lagosians is "naira currency notes", as this renders redundant the function of the place marker in the first sentence where the country in which this story transpires has already been identified with the reference to Lagos. That as it is, the father insists on taking his two young boys to witness the corporal punishment of The Law in order to instil fear in them, hoping that they will not grow up to be gang members in a country where "some robbers were as young as twelve" (12). By the end of the story, incidentally, his eldest son Yemi, a now "a hardened marijuana smoker", is himself "executed at the Lagos Bar Beach" by "the military government" (21). But, the writing was on the wall for Yemi, since the tension in the father-son dialogue, juxtaposed with that of the narrator, already prefigures a good son bad son trope, quite obvious in its didactic charge. Like many of his stories, Osondu's "Bar Beach Show" has incongruous fragments that a reading alongside the market would enhance, had there been a more spiritual

language that did not blur the image of the human, the cultural software, in favour of the grammar of exteriority, a socio-political hardware. For instance, the narrator comes home one day to find his father agonising about having been laid off work. The father blames the neighbours, seeing this as "the handiwork of my enemies" who have been "praying for my downfall" (19). The narrator's father adds:

> They said it is the government's austerity measure that has made everything difficult. But why me? There are so many other people that were asked to go, what did I do? I am always the first person to get to the factory, and now… who is going to pay the children's school fees and the rent and our feeding? (19)

To justify his response to the sense of urgency necessitated by his positionality, Osondu also mentions, elsewhere, that "in the short story, there is no room for the kind of strolling narrative that you find in novels" (Wilson para. 2). Still, rather than use what little enunciatory room there is at his disposal to make sense of, or at least gesture towards, the macro-economic movements that put low income earners at risk of dispensability by global capitalism, the space is given to rudimentary questions that would be better left implied, given that the reader has by this stage already been told that the father is the sole breadwinner, and that his eldest son has succumbed to the very life that an early exposure to corporal punishment was intended to discourage.

We might also argue that a different representational strategy, perhaps one in which the characters negotiate their position of alterity through a distinctly anti-global capitalist paradigm, would enable Osondu to convey subaltern otherness without allowing it to remain a site of irrecoverable difference. And so, the types of mitigating strategies to be found in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* do not surface in Osondu's *Voice of America*. Of particular interest, still on the negotiation of a double bind, is Bulawayo's ironic use of the forms of traditional tragedy in order to prevent the spectator (the reader) from identifying fully with the protagonist, Darling, and her plight both in Africa and in the United States. Darling is indeed the sufferer we witness throughout the pages of the novel, but in our witnessing her as a subject moving through various stages of her life under socio-political and socio-economic ordinances, Bulawayo enables Darling to retain her alterity. This permission to retain alterity is useful only because it implicates (or even incriminates) the reader in the suffering on display. Instead of *Schadenfreude*, a type a pleasurable pity derived from recognising oneself as better off than the suffering which one witnesses, the reader experiences a type of pity that

is, as Mike Marais writes about another book of a similar inflection, grounded in shame and a sense of collective responsibility (127-128). Osondu's stories, however, leave little to no room for a collective responsibility, placating its reader, as it does, into understanding Africa in very unspecific terms, even when such an understanding, despite its being expedient for generating urgency, leads to an absolving of collective responsibility. In that way, the issues about Africa that the text brings into focus— poverty, civil war, corruption, gender based violence, and so forth— are seen to arise extemporaneously, or as a natural result of postcolonial African governmentality. This does little to recuperate the narrative from merely a spectacle of suffering to a responsibly positioned narrative about Africa within the global economy.

By way of a concluding example, the double bind that Osondu faces can also be understood in terms of James Ferguson's provocation, related to the very category of Africa that the author quite fully embraces. In his book, *Global Shadows, Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, Ferguson issues a challenge to academics of the humanities and social sciences who have refused the category of 'Africa' as empirically problematic, but who have, because of this refusal, become bystanders in the broader conversation about Africa taking place in other arenas. Ferguson proposes an understanding of Africa not so much as a regional empirical territory, but as a category:

> [t]hrough which a "world" is structured –a category that (like all categories) is historically and socially constructed (indeed in some sense arbitrary), but also a category that is "real", that is imposed with force, that has a mandatory quality; a category within which and according to which, people must live. (5)

For Ferguson, academia has come full circle in its discourse about Africa, from what V.Y. Mudimbe had termed "the invention of Africa" (1988) to a discursive atmosphere in which the very discipline that was responsible for this invention of 'Africa', now has nearly nothing to say about it as a collective category in its time of crisis. Surely, the reasons for this reluctance are understandable; for instance, the fear of reducing Africa, the vast landmass of heterogeneous subjectivities, to a monolith. We might add, as a provisional rejoinder to Ferguson's remarks, that where the academy seems reluctant to invoke Africa in macroscopic or panoptic terms, it seems to point to a literary rendezvous at which two significant examples of the double bind of contemporary African migrant writing, *We Need New Names* and *Voice of America*, respectively, complementarily congregate.

So, with a meeting convened, and in light of the incursion of 'urgency' for both texts, the two texts place on the agenda a somewhat awkward literary question mark about the hermeneutics of Africa that other contemporary African writers have kept in abeyance. Is there a sense in which these two contemporary African migrant texts, which negotiate the complexities of writing about Africa, enact a version of the discourse with which Ferguson is concerned? Ferguson's concept of the globe finds itself in the same milieu as some of the itineraries about world literature that I have explored above and in Chapter One. Importantly, in the same way that 'world', for Cheah, is a spiritually inflected concept, the 'global', for Ferguson, will need to embrace something of a spiritual dimension, and must thus be "a new framing of discussions of the global: centred less on transnational flows and images of unfettered connection than on the social relations that selectively constitute global society; the statuses and ranks that it comprises; and the relations, rights and obligations that characterise it" (Ferguson 23).

For African migrant writing to assume this new discursive posture, it must confront the tension between forms of exteriority that articulate the material edifice of the globe, and the inner, spiritual relations that add up to make a world proper. If, in their narrative strategies, *We Need New Names* and *Voice of America* demonstrate the fault lines of contemporary African migrant writing, they do so in their structurally interpellated position, where the double bind is already waiting to leave its mark. The texts require us to ask in what ways can a minimalist modality, disinclined to detail and the particular, fortify the project of interiority and, thus, a worldly spirituality? Contemporary African migrant writing that is submitted to the decree of the language of 'urgency', the two texts seem to suggest, is not equipped to facilitate the project of particularity and character interiority that can give us a fuller sense of our troubled times. In the remaining chapters, I will proceed in the spirit of a reading alongside the market, attempting to trace literary and stylistic iterations of social justice that are less anchored by an exterior injunction of urgency. As such, I will read the chapters on Mengestu, Selasi and Cole for their supplementation of exteriority and minimalism, instructed by the more enabling framework that Spivak sets up in saying: "The supplement knows the exact shape of the gap that must be filled, not any blank but a textual blank, a blank framed by a text that must be known with critical intimacy rather than critical distance" (*Readings* 12). The novels and narrative techniques in the three remaining chapters, it will appear, offer us a significantly updated toolkit for an efficacious engagement with globality and the negotiation of its attendant double bind.

Chapter Three

Stranded in Globality: Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*

> Capitalist realism presents itself as a shield protecting us from the perils posed by itself.
>
> --- Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*

African migrants' spiritual strivings

Dinaw Mengestu's debut novel *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, has been read as speaking to questions of identity and subject formation in the life of African migrants in America. In his *New York Times* review, Rob Nixon says of it that the author ingeniously sketches a "shadowing of two cities", a shadowing of his surroundings with images of movements and experiences he once had but has now lost, moments of memory, dislocation and even territoriality between his adopted home, Washington D.C., and his former locale Addis Ababa. This framing of the novel certainly positions it within an easily recognizable category, which already establishes a set of ethical and political imperatives, or even expectations, with which the novel in a way complies. While such a reading is no doubt useful and even genuinely faithful to the imperatives of contemporary migration, it does highlight what I think constitutes a predicament in the approaches to African writing of this sort. We can account for this dilemma by considering how it may also have something to do with the materialist account of the world as I outlined in Chapter One.

As I have argued in the Introduction of this thesis, when we underscore the more normative component of 'world' in world literature, a novel such as Mengestu's appears to resist approaches that presume, as with a certain sense at the level of urgency, that the writing will *a priori* be a surrogacy for the expression of the liminal intensities of diasporic formation. Rightfully praising the narrative techniques of the novel, Nixon nevertheless has a sense of something like the double bind of African migrant writing, he observes that "[i]t's rare that a novelist who can comfortably take on knotty political subjects like exile, memory and class conflict is also able to write with wisdom, wit and tenderness about the *frisson* of romance" (Nixon para. 10). In this chapter, I read the novel with W.E.B. Du Bois' idea of double consciousness in mind, in order to emphasise the spiritual dimension implicit in the consciousness of marginal collectives. Thinking with Du Bois, I reflect on how this balance between the political and the interior, the dispositional dimensions of migrancy vis-à-vis the

juridical modes of migrant life, might have something to do with the more supple narrative technique that Mengestu employs. Such a narrative strategy seems to make it easier to develop interiority independently of the injunction of urgency and unconsumed, or less so, by the ethnographic imperative. In this way, the writing can more fully explore the psychic and spiritual dimensions of individual subjecthood. To what extent does a predetermined focus on aesthetic cosmopolitanism, for instance, reveal the extent to which Mengestu's writing operates as a critique of the very structure of globality? To anchor this point only briefly, for now, we can take Chris Abani's *Los Angeles Times* review of Mengestu as one which quite properly echoes the chorus of similar celebratory readings that indicate their predisposition to identity and culture. This celebration of the novel in advance, based, for instance, on the alterity of its author in the circuit of world lit, is one instantiation of the double bind. From such a standpoint, Mengestu is said to "belong to that special group of American voices produced by global upheavals and intentional, if sometimes forced, migrations" (Abani 2007). For Abani, himself a transnational Nigerian author and critic, the novel "is a retelling of the immigrant experience, one in which immigrants must come to terms with the past and find *a way to be loyal to two ideas of home*," one of an erstwhile locale and another of the life they are making in America.

Leave alone that Abani locates the thematic concerns of this and other such novels within the category of contemporary realism, confining the text to a mode of 'retelling', the centre of gravity in such a reading remains within the domain of a predetermined discursive space. In this chapter, I am interested in the novel's inflections of the spiritualist conception of the world, the opaque qualities of the novel, its allegorical but still scrupulously economic iterations. I argue that *Beautiful Things* is inscribed with a melancholic tenor, facilitated by one highly strung protagonist who reflects the sense of the disjointed time of globalisation, and so stages a commentary on the capitalist mode of production and its violent social fracturing.

I also examine how the novel instantiates a temporality, past Addis bleeds into present Washington, and the protagonist's willed "stasis" against the "progressive" narratives of Americana, seem to unsettle the kinds of hegemonic temporalities of which Pheng Cheah writes, and which at the same time moves the text outside geospatial delineations. In the end, Mengestu shows us that it will not be enough for migrants themselves to simply enter the machinery of globalisation, and that futurity or messianic hope for a just world will require radical imaginative capabilities. The novel's vision of a present framed by a temporal

horizon, reverses the narrative of progress punted by globalisation. In a way, this reversal constitutes an epistemic rearrangement.

In search of the spirit of the novel, I examine how *Beautiful Things* provides a sophisticated critique of the established structures of the market and late capitalism within globalisation, and thereby supplements the tendency to foreground identity politics that arrive much earlier at the scene of reading. An ethical reading practice will show how, by deploying a distinctly melancholic tone that reflects the unending circularity of the time of globalisation, Mengestu's thematic concerns, belonging and unbelonging, cosmopolitanism and cultural deracination and so on, reveal the temporal dimension of a specifically global financial economic order. Though completely accurate in their summation of the novels, Abani and Nixon's reviews are significant because they anticipate my concern with a couple of the items I have listed on the agenda, namely, the intrusion of authorial genius in the form of the ethnographic imperative for urgency, as well as the spatial treatment of the world, a world understood primarily for its materiality, and thus the global capitalist world that governs the movements of 'world literature'.

Critically acclaimed, *Beautiful Things* depicts the life of Sepha Stephanos, an Ethiopian migrant who seeks refuge in the United States in the mid-80s following violent political unrest in his home country. Set in 1997, the novel follows the everyday routine of Sepha who, in the novel's narrative present, lives in a less than modest apartment in Washington D.C., where he also runs a struggling convenience store on Logan Circle. A former affluent neighbourhood which once was home to the families and friends of business moguls and politicians in Washington, Logan Circle is a neighbourhood of struggling and hapless African-Americans – Sepha's neighbours – an assortment of prostitutes, johns, the elderly and countless drunkards loitering in and around the area.

At the same time, Logan Circle is gradually undergoing steady gentrification, with a new and steadily emerging crop of white property owners intent on renovating and reviving the deteriorated urban space, unsurprisingly increasing the regional property value slowly but surely. From a stool behind his shop counter, Sepha spends his days observing the comings and goings of the ill-fated black people in his district, content with his position as observer, until he forms a tenuous relationship with Judith, a professor of American history who has recently moved in, taking advantage of the low rents of Logan Circle and beginning her own renovations. Judith's young daughter, Naomi, who spends her time consuming book after book, develops a profound friendship with Sepha, himself an avid reader, which serves as the backdrop of the novel's concern with psychological healing. In the very opening paragraph of

the novel, we are introduced to Sepha and his long-time friends who met each other when they were "all new immigrants working as valets at the Capitol Hotel" (1).

It is there that "Kenneth became Ken the Kenyan and Joseph, Joe from the Congo" (1), who have since established a well-balanced triangular friendship, marked by their shared histories and experiences of loss and trauma in their younger years in Africa. In the case of Sepha, his trauma relates to the death of his father at the hands of ruthless militia men on the lookout for any civil disobedience, for which Sepha feels responsible, having acquired a stack of anti-government pamphlets to be handed out. The militia men discover the agitprop stash during a random raid, which leads to his father's death. Sepha and his friends, now going on two decades in the U.S., habitually play a game in which one person provides a name of an African dictator, as well as a date, at which point the other person attempts to provide the relevant and corresponding coup. They have been at this game for over a year now, and have expanded their playing field "to include failed coups, rebellions, minor insurrections, guerrilla leaders, and the acronyms of as many rebel groups we can find – the SPLA, TPLF, LRA, UNITA – anyone who has picked up a gun in the name of revolution" (3). The game, described in the first chapter of the novel, serves as a way of symbolically revisiting the moments of loss and trauma that resulted in their respective forced migrations in the first place. It is also a way of recounting the repeated attempts at state seizure which were intended to bring about a revolution, but became hopelessly ineffectual, giving the friends a solid foundation for the resonance with their favourite song, the early 70s T Rex hit, 'Children of the Revolution'. What can this game, for instance, tell us about the supposed link between state capture and economic gain?

Their obsession with the game renders them forever tied to the continent of Africa, which would give credence to the reality that "new immigrants from damaged places" engage in rituals that attempt to palliate their sense of violent displacement, "their need to keep alive textured memories – even memories that wound – amid American's demanding amnesia" (Nixon para. 6). The theme of displacement in the novel is clear, since our narrator indeed has a relationship with two cities, Addis Ababa as well as Washington D.C. He sends Christmas gifts to addresses in both cities, and moves from one psychic space to another, finding ultimately at the end of the novel that he is "a man stuck between two worlds […] dangled and suspended long enough" (228) that he is ready to accept a lonely death given his impoverishment.

A zealous reader, Sepha loans a number of books from the library in order to kill time while tending to his derelict shop since only a few customers, many of them non-paying, visit

the store on a daily basis. He therefore has an uneasy relationship with time, where on occasion, "left alone behind the counter", he is "hit with the sudden terrible and frightening realization" (40); "everything I had cared for and loved" he laments "was either lost or living on without me seven thousand miles away, and that what I had here was not a life, but a poorly constructed substitute made up of one uncle, two friends, a grim store, and a cheap apartment" (40). The novel's socio-political investment is clear. But, because of the intensities of the character's interiority that simultaneously bespeak the crisis of globalisation, we might say that Mengestu manages to underscore, as Ralph Ellison has written about the socio-economic condition of black folk, that "it is not culture which binds the people who are of partially African origin now scattered throughout the world, but an intensity of *passions*. We share a hatred for the alienation forced upon us by Europeans during the process of colonisation and empire, and we are bound by our common suffering more than by our pigmentation" (263). The world making potential of *Beautiful Things* thus relies on its universal qualities, not on the identification of African-ness, since "even this identification is shared by most non-white peoples, and while it has political value of great potency, its cultural value is almost nil" (263). This will also connect to one of the concerns in the next chapter of Selasi, as I attempt to read the musicality of this shared experience of suffering by understanding melancholia as immanent to the structure of the blues texture that the writing takes on.

I return to Abani's invocation of the novel's realist sensibilities in his review, to outline the stakes of capitalism's convergence with temporal politics, and the implications for world literature that Abani's response suggests. Bearing in mind the dynamism of world literature as indicated by Cheah, it must instantiate rather than re-represent the world, my reading converges with Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge who, in their book *Reading Capitalist Realism*, describe a realism that is not simply a representational mode or even an aesthetic one. Rather, they invite us to think about realism as a "general ideological formation in which capitalism is the most real of our horizons, the market-dominant present that forms the limits of our imaginaries" (Shonkwiler 2).[26] As it relates to the novel, of

[26] We should note that the term capitalist realism is not a new coinage by Shonkwiler and La Berge, or even of Mark Fisher's as suggested by the epigraph of this chapter. The phrase has a particularly artistic genealogy, first used by the German artist Gerhardt Richter, who took his artistic procedure from quotidian images that reflected the space from which they emerge, a space consumed by capitalist productivity (Mulligan 116). But further complicating the term, Fisher and La Berge "suggest that the phrase applies to works that extent postmodernism, that exhibit a neoliberal or that problematically employ realism to historicize late-stage capitalism" (Mulligan 117).

course, realism has implications for "the critical functions available to literary representations" (21), so that my ultimate guiding question is, how does *Beautiful Things* open up possibilities for imaginative or epistemic rearrangement? To what extent to does the staging of the protagonist's melancholia reflect the crisis of globality and the "illegible abstractions of finance capital," while the novel moves our imagination to a more legible view of globality's proliferation? Taking Shonkwiler and La Berge's directive, my reading of Mengestu is necessarily anchored by the notion that capitalism, if we think of it as a global organising system does not, or cannot, exist without representational modes available for its reification (Shonkwiler 17).

If realism is a mode, it is "invested in an economically situated concept of history" as well as the present (17). This is a connection to temporality that is important since the novel stages a concern with capital's "aspiration to a final assimilation of time" which renders impossible any alternative to "temporal insecurity and uncertainty", the horizon of globalisation (Scott 12). It is for this reason that, Lee Medovoi writing about the shift from national to a transnational regime of accumulation, highlights globalization's preferred narrative of itself, its immutable unfolding in time, or indeed its unstoppable nature, as being built into the very title "globalisation" (163). We can assume a similar innate quality to globality as it is figured in *Beautiful Things*. If there is a sense in which "[a]ll realism is already capitalist" (Shonkwiler 1), this which renders redundant any claims to the term 'capitalist realism'. Indeed, the novel takes social, economic and political possibility in globalisation as bound up with the prevailing mode of production. In so doing, it brings into view the point that has been made by critics such as Mark Fisher, who asserts in *Capitalist Realism*, that we have come to accept "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (4). Accordingly, capitalist realism "is therefore not a particular type of realism; it is more like realism itself" (4), reverberating with the decimation of time, and the power to define 'reality' as discussed in Chapter One.

Migrant double consciousness and imaginative potential

I will briefly outline a synthesized understanding of W.E.B. Du Bois' double consciousness, taking it as an organising principle in the analysis of this chapter. At this point, the reader might be wondering about my rationale for thinking through globality via Du Bois specifically. The justification has to do in part with the way Du Bois, unlike many of his contemporaries, was able intuit the role of the imagination and an aesthetic education in the

development of democratic intuitions and the development of the will to social justice. Curiously, the reading of *Beautiful Things* seems to activate the imagination towards the same temporal frame that concerns Du Bois' in his meditations about temporal disjunctures and racial time under capitalism. Writing *The Souls of Black Folk* as a historian and social economist, already in 1903, Du Bois was concerned with the material conditions of the possibility of progress for the black subject, 'the Negro', that he argued could only be established if black folk were seen as complex beings whose identity is formed within the structuration of socio-economic phenomena produced by the state that does not contain them as full citizens. The rhetoric of Du Bois in thinking about the development of the American polity along racial and economic lines has at its foundation precisely this dilemma; the duality of the epistemic certainty of black folks, which is mediated by a white world such that "one ever feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro, two souls two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (2). This of course implies that to be American, and thus to be a citizen, is to be white. Also, it necessarily means that which is not white consists of this duality, forever marked by hyphenation so that the path to full citizenship remains confronted with the presence of the ontological certainty of one's being black, Negro, African.

It is also in *Souls* that Du Bois ponders the conception of temporality, but particularly the relation between temporality and biopolitical configuration. For Du Bois, whose Marxist principles saturated his life's work, the facts of the material condition of black people in thinking about progress are not to be conceived of within a capitalist realist framework, since to do so is to capitulate precisely to the organising system that restricts imaginative potential of alternative worlds. Indeed, and as *Beautiful Things* shows us, it is the axiom of capitalism, or more accurately, the 'realism' of the taken for granted 'world' of globalisation that functions as a legitimatising narrative for globality. Such a narrative further implies that in order to contest aspects of society which we deem unequal or non-conducive to the realisation of an equal relationship to the state, we must proceed from an acquiescence to the organising system, capitalist civilization, and to remonstrate against it from within its rational and structural parameters. This is one dimension of capitalist realism, the inherently strong regulation of our imaginative potential to conceive of an alternative to the prevailing global economic order.

So, when he asserts that what is central to the condition of black people is a want of "self-knowledge –a kind of spiritual hesitation in a world where spirit rules", Du Bois immediately locates the potential for social change for black people within the ambit of

epistemic rearrangement and thus, the imagination (Spivak, *Du Bois Lecture*, 2009). Nonetheless, his historical analysis of the socio-economic mobility of black people immediately following slavery, under the government's efforts to aid newly freed slaves through the Freedmen's Bureau, suggests that there was a sense in which black folk in America were primed to enter the domain of full citizenship from their position as underclass. For Du Bois, the Bureau represented "one of the most singular and interesting attempts to grapple with the vast problems of race *and* social conditions" (12 emphasis added). The withdrawal of the Freedman's Bureau, which was established as a type of social welfare infrastructure for formerly rebellious Southern states, directly undercut the efforts to move black people from the category of subalternity into citizenship, and in the process confirmed how a state centred contempt for social welfare and the condition of black people enabled the subalternisation of the Negro. To recall Spivak, when Du Bois considers a stateless group as uneducated and illiterate, as in his essay "On the Meaning of Progress", which attends to those "born without and beyond the World" (Du Bois 42), he places us squarely within the domain of the African, American (as yet unhyphenated) subaltern (Spivak, *Du Bois Lecture*, 2009). Indeed, this position of subalternity necessarily implies that one has no relationship to the state legitimate or otherwise, and that one is, in other words, within the state – without the state.

And yet, even as socio-economic infrastructure can be established to permit black people's 'spiritual strivings', this is only a first step. The material conditions cannot alone satiate such a striving and hunger for coming into citizenship, since "we daily hear that an education that encourages aspiration, that sets the loftiest of ideals and seeks as an end culture and character rather than breadwinning, is the privilege of white men and the danger and delusion of black" (58-59). Du Bois' exemplarity is that he manages to synthesize biopolitics and economics to provide a complex, thicker understanding of the double consciousness that is inevitably the promise of black life within capitalism as a mode of production. Importantly, his synthesis involves a collective consciousness and an education that can possiblise epistemic rearrangement, the most significant aspect of his critique, since "it would not do to concentrate all the efforts on economic well-being and forget freedom and manhood and equality" (7). Instead, Du Bois points us towards the singular and the unverifiable, in the direction of imaginative potential, since "[n]egroes must live and eat and strive, and still *hold an unfaltering commerce with the stars*" (7). It is this economic exigency together with a want for an 'unfaltering commerce with the stars', an attention not only to the

needs but also to the *desires* of the subaltern, which enables us to read the echoes of Du Bois' instructive in the novel.

Simon Gikandi's 2005 essay "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Identity of Africa", in which he works through the aesthetic discourse privileged by Du Bois, concluding that the more difficult task in setting Du Boisian analytics to work is not "the condition of blackness as a paradox or aporia" (para. 4), but rather to show that "in the absence of a political domain that would secure universal freedom, the turn to aesthetic questions would provide a means of grasping the history of this absence; that aesthetic modernism—even one informed by notions of African primitivism—would enable the overcoming of the political force of modernity as a form of alienation" (4). Now, it is not by chance that Gikandi's formulation draws attention to aesthetic modernism. Recall that Fredric Jameson reminded us as early as 1991 in his book *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, that modernity as a historical category is predicated on the principal of individualism as opposed to the commune, and in that way it is necessarily the cornerstone of capitalism in its move from feudalism toward the market economy, industrialisation as well as urbanisation. Gikandi recognises the force of capital operative in double consciousness, measuring the aesthetic in the essential terms outlined by Du Bois, which ultimately insist on the economic materiality of the black condition. Such a condition is entangled with what Du Bois would call a 'spiritual striving', or what in his 1906 essay 'The Education of Black People', he articulated as "a want of self-confidence, self-assertiveness, and self-knowledge –a kind of spiritual hesitation in a world where spirit rules" (24). This is no doubt a symbolic moment in the intellectual life of Du Bois since it reemphasises the force of the vision he had earlier outlined in *The Souls of Black Folk*, namely, that to understand the Negro is to come to terms with the synthesis of her life within capitalist civilisation, which foregrounds her economic materiality, as well as her more spiritual striving which, by virtue of existing in a state that both contains and expels the black subject, is punctuated by a certain double consciousness.

On the face of it then, one can imagine that *Beautiful Things* belongs to the subgenre called 'African migration fiction', by which is typically meant fiction that concentrates its energies on the narratives of assimilation and empowerment in the 'hegemonic centre', following migration from the 'global margins'. Such fiction is therefore concerned with the processes of resistance to or of acculturation within the hegemonic centre, after a struggle for identity formation (Gonzalez 203). However, as Caren Irr has noted in her book *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the Twenty-First Century*, in which she traces an emerging genre which tinkers with the conventions of immigration narratives, a novel such as

Beautiful Things, or indeed a character such as Sepha, can be said to reflect a shift away from "the personal universe of trauma" toward "a public and political effort to think life stories that exceed those provided by the sending and receiving nations" (Irr 29). Irr refers to this shift as a move toward the geopolitical novel, one which turns away from thematic concerns with cultural loss and collective histories of trauma and their resultant "absorption by the historical wound", tending rather to "map the restless psychology of the newly mobile contemporary global subjects" (50).

Part of this restless psychology has to do with the relationship to personal aspiration, which is itself tied to the values of the social life of the community in which the characters find themselves. The protagonist in *Beautiful Things* is not particularly moved to fulfil any personal aspirations that are mediated by his position of migrancy, or if he is, his relationship to such ambitions is ambivalent at best, on the one hand dreaming about a version of success which includes upward mobility in the adopted homeland, and on the other hand, resigning himself to the forces of capitalist globalisation that have placed him in the position of observer in his now gentrifying neighbourhood. He is therefore unable to participate and succeed in the social environment, and elects instead to negotiate his limited agency, unlike his friend Kenneth, who seems to have adopted the neoliberal mantra of globalisation, that notwithstanding where one is from, no matter what one's personal histories are, there is prospect and opportunity available for the taking if one simply works hard enough. Kenneth therefore relies on American platitudes such as "the power of a well-tailored suit to command the attention and respect of those who might not otherwise give him a second thought" (Mengestu 14) and although he is aware of its spuriousness, he "believes that American men are successful because they say the same thing over and over again" until the repetition of such clichés as 'hard work' and 'fighting the good fight' becomes axiomatic and manifest into material goods. And while this seems somewhat dramatic, Kenneth's enthusiasm is anchored by the conviction that individual agency is advanced only "[b]y investing. By preparing for the future" (190) since "[y]ou can't stay still, man. You have to move on. That's the way the world works" (190), even though this world is overdetermined by the socioeconomic fluctuations of global finance capital.

And so, Sepha, attempting to follow this line of reasoning, adds a deli counter to his crumbling store, hoping that he too "could profit from the houses that gleamed with their newly restored glory" (17), although the arrival of Judith and other white middle-class neighbours heralds, instead of rapid growth, a series of evictions and displacements of low income families and small businesses. In this way, the novel represents, as Pieter Vermeulen

notes in his essay "Reading alongside the Market: Affect and Mobility in Contemporary Migrant Fiction" the limitations of the illusion of "shared material progress" (286) brought on by gentrification. Mengestu's novel therefore suggests that there are no structural parallels "between larger socioeconomic trends and personal profit" which in turn places its own pressures on "the idea that there is a significant relation between investment and reward" and in the process challenges the accepted maxim of the ideology of upward mobility that is concomitant with its notion of meritocracy upon which capitalism is predicated (286).

Mengestu's novel is an example of what happens when biopolitics and the phenomenology of the market interact with one another in the text, reversing the particularly identitarian grammar of the migrant's diasporic positionality, and accentuating the normative conception of world. To the extent that *Beautiful Things* demonstrates the contradictory condition of the migrant as at once stateless and citizen, the quasi-foundational precarity of globalisation, it registers a sense of the spiritualist account of the world, delving deep into the interiority of a protagonist who is striving to achieve access to the infrastructures of the state, even if only abstractly. This is a response to the call for urgency through a synthesised form of double consciousness, class-sensitivity as well as race-sensitivity.

If we analyse the novel's first half, which presents us with two different types of immigrant figures embodied by the characters of Kenneth and Joseph on the one hand, and Sepha on the other, we find differing modes of mobility, and thus differing modes of subject formation, which are mediated by the different ideological attachments in which the migrants find recourse. The two friends act as a foil to the character of Sepha. To that extent, we are reminded that there are after all, among the African immigrant communities, "those who wake each morning ready to conquer the day" (35) such as Kenneth, whose marginal success after years of investment of time, money and energy, complicates the embedded critique of capitalism. Kenneth repeatedly insists that Sepha extends his opening hours with the belief that hard work pays off, and that powerful men can do as they please once they seize agency and perform as though they nevertheless have power in social settings to the extent that, faced with a situation they do not find satisfactory "they can dismiss with a wave of a hand and never think twice about it" (35). Despite these personal claims to power at a micro-political level, "there are those of us" ponders Sepha, "who wake only because we have to. We live in the shadows of every neighbourhood. We own corner stores, live in run-down apartments that get too little light, and walk the same streets day after day", (35) a declaration of an urban provincialism which moves us beyond aspiration and into the arena of migrant melancholia, where "we spend our afternoons gazing lazily out of windows" (35). Sepha

therefore mocks Kenneth's American doctrines of manifest destiny since for him, neither powerful nor vulnerable individuals, indeed even communities, are able to exert any form of power or control over their circumstances in the macroeconomic environment which the two aspirants should know well since (being children of the revolutions) they all have a shared experience of social adversity and the inauspicious false promise of the claim to full citizenship.

As a result, whether we are collectives of protesters resisting gentrification and finance capitalism or individuals intent on manipulating forms of power to our benefit, "we all essentially want the same thing" which is to feel that at some level we have "a stake in shaping and defining what little part of the world we could claim as our own" (211). For Sepha then, the community of migrants with which he identifies, although small and inconsequential to the greater African migrant narrative of success, is earlier characterised as those who "wake to sleep and sleep to wake" (35). More importantly, however, they have resigned themselves to the macro-political ontology of globality, resonating with Walter Benn Michael's claim that their narratives move 'from moral allegory' to a 'resigned' capitalist realism in which they accept the status quo as that about which little can be done. Naturally, this also makes Sepha seem an imprudent immigrant, unable to reckon with the final destination that is America. Because of this, Joseph insists that Sepha's hatred for America is "because he doesn't understand it" (6) even after the former repeatedly teaches him that "[t]his country is like a little bastard child. You can't be angry when it doesn't give you what you want […] But you have to praise it when it comes close, otherwise it'll turn around and bite you in the ass" (7). To make sense of this kind of affinity and love by an aspirant migrant, one has to imagine that the love of the country in this vein has more to do with the proximity it provides to one's aspirations, whatever those might be, than to the actual attainment of any real dream. Yet Sepha seems to understand America just fine, including what constitutes a good day in America, the low inflation rates and gas prices indicated at the end of a business day, "countries all across the globe [successfully] negotiating deals" including Africa, while "their leaders shake hands on the cover of *Washington Post* under headlines of restored hope and promises of [global free market] cooperation" (42).The difference, the novel suggests, is that while Kenneth and Joseph attempt to move with the temporal flow of a type of capitalist realism, Sepha seems to have resigned himself to the deprivation of subaltern migrant subject formation, making a conscious decision to remove himself from the lines of upward mobility. The African migrant in the novel occupies two opposite ends of the same capitalist realist spectrum.

To be clear, insofar as Mengestu's *Beautiful Things* demonstrates a synthesised notion of double consciousness, the combinatory effects of race and class in America; the ruse of the American Dream within migrant subject formation understood as an upshot of globalisation; and the 'spiritual striving' of black migrant subjects in general, the novel seems to reflect the spirit of Du Bois' thematic concerns in *Souls*. In fact, precisely because of the conjunctures between the prosody in the novel and its investment in the radical disillusionment with the temporality of globalisation, the novel stages a commentary about black subjectivity beyond identity. In this way, Mengestu's response to the call of the ethnographic imperative that imposes limitations and demands on the writing in advance, is to draw attention to the very scene from which that injunction is issued.

Certainly, taken as one component of world literature, the most important causality that appears to have exceeded the enunciatory modality of the novel is its propensity to contribute to our understanding of the world beyond its spatial dimension. By weaving together the spiritual lives of African migrants across temporalities, not just physical borders, the novel lends precisely to the normative element of the world that I set out to explain in Chapter One. Consequently, *Beautiful Things* comes close to a dynamic conception of world literature that does not focus all its energies on global circulation, as though it were produced as a response to a call. The novel also demonstrates a treatment of the world as having been created by globalisation. Instead of merely describing and analysing its own imbrication with global market values, it further exerts a normative force in the world, and opens up in the process an "ethicopolitical horizon" for our already existing world (Cheah 5). Even as it appears to lend credence to a spatial conception of the world, what makes Mengestu's novel particularly interesting is the resource it seems to offer for resisting globalisation's appropriation of time at an imaginative level. This has to do in part with the experimentation with time (and hence the world and the globe) at a thematic and formal level, incorporating the migrant subjects into the world system, which forces them to contend with their being inescapably tethered to "Western modernity's unrelenting march of progress and capitalist time" (Cheah 19). This insertion into the world-system or globality, simultaneously and violently destroys alternative temporalities, and thus the very potential to imagine alternative temporalities. Recall that Cheah, writing about the accumulation of capital and its relationship to worlding, highlights the role of time in this procedure (11). Capital is, ultimately:

> Augmented by rational technologies and calculations that appropriate and manage time for maximal extraction of surplus value. But capital can neither give itself time nor destroy it and, moreover, does not want to destroy it. This means that an irreducible principle of real messianic hope is always structural to capitalist globalisation. The persistence of time is *infrastructural* to capital and cannot be destroyed. As an enactment of the opening of worlds by the coming of time, world literature points to something that will always exceed and disrupt capital. (11)

It is profitable to think of Mengestu's novel in terms of the discursive space cleared out by Cheah, since at the heart of this provocative argument is the idea that any work of art worthy of the name 'world literature' will have to contain within it the ability to *create* a world by temporalizing it. Therefore, still following Cheah, its proclivity to open up new possibilities of capitalist resistance will be marked by the extent to which it can negotiate with the inhuman force of time.

How can we make sense of Mengestu's attention to a type of 'resignation' to the present temporal impasse? Moving in on the machinations of power and globality, Walter Benn Michaels notes a shift in the world literature that I have suggested contains a world making impulse. For him, the thrust of literature on globalisation lies in the move "from moral allegory to a resigned realism" (15) that frames the temporal horizon of the writing. Ultimately, *Beautiful Things* gestures towards African migrants spiritual striving, quite in keeping with the synthesised procedure of Du Bois' philosophical positing of double consciousness. In this respect, the novel mobilises a temporalizing operation. It is for this reason that towards the end of the novel, Sepha observes the escalating processes of the anti-gentrification movement that have taken hold of his neighbourhood, refusing to cast judgment on Judith for her having taken advantage of the low rent in Logan Circle after a series of obscene refurbishments she undertakes following her purchase of the abandoned house.

Although Sepha is in love with Judith, it is not his love for her that suspends his judgment of her participation in the capitalist system to which he is subjected, but his acknowledgment of *his own* complicity, especially against his will, with the world system of free market finance capital. He notes with irony how he too was an earlier, if less threatening, embodiment of invasion which had thus put him "in no position" to sincerely "say what was right or wrong" when Mrs. Davis, the elderly black widow who lives next door to him, speaks of him as part of the community now suffering the effects of rising rents. Either

because she and Sepha are both black (he is from Africa and she is American), or because he has been a longstanding local shopkeeper in the derelict neighbourhood, Mrs. Davis, who spearheads the anti-gentrification project, takes for granted that Sepha is a constituent of the vulnerable community, while Sepha dis-identifies with this interpellation , instead recognizing himself as "one of 'these people'", against Mrs. Davis' characterization. He reflects on this own fragile relationship with the community, remarking that "I hadn't forced anyone out but I had never really been a part of Logan Circle either, at least not in the way Mrs. Davis and most of my customers were" (189), because he had "snuck into the neighbourhood as well" (189). Sepha therefore appreciates his imbrication with the totalizing nature of global capitalism when he comments that just like Judith "I had used it for its cheap rent, and if others were now doing the same, then what right did I have to deny them?" (189).

If we consider that Sepha acknowledges how the change that transpired in Logan Circle "wasn't gradual, nor rapid, but somewhere in between" where only a couple of years prior he would "spot the occasional odd face walking past [his] storefront window – a white woman carrying groceries home early in the evening, a man jogging with his dog shortly after dusk – and think little of it" (24); we begin to see precisely how, as the forces of capitalism rub up against the static immigrant melancholia, they create a situation in which African migrants reify their positon as "passive helpless observations of people stuck living on the side-lines" (23). Indeed, the development unfolding right before Sepha's eyes is seen as unavoidable, in the familiar way that capitalism forces us to become reconciled with its natural authoritativeness. At the very beginning, Sepha notes that "[i]t wasn't until the summer before Judith moved into the neighbourhood that the change began in earnest, which is to say it became inevitable" (24), which once again offers a tragic view of the future to come, only to be accepted by those who live under the socioeconomic organisation of a capitalist civilisation.

Even though Sepha inhabits both cities simultaneously, the Addis of his youth which is lived out in memories, and the vicissitudes of the Washington of his adulthood which he experiences as a hapless African migrant, the novel seems to suggest that there is a force, akin to the one described by Bill Clinton in his globalisation and nature analogy that I will point to below, that does the work of subalternisation. Yet, Caren Irr locates this subalternity in Sepha's being "caught between the upwardly mobile immigrant's plan to acquire education, wealth, and consumer purchasing power and the Ethiopian enclave's rejection of American values" (Irr 51). Ultimately, this dialectic between upward mobility and an

apparent collective rejection of American values, by which Irr means the American dream, is something of a misnomer for our narrator-protagonist. Specifically, Sepha does not even seek empowerment within U.S. identity – which includes the principles of fierce dedication to the capitalist order. Instead he finds solace in the melancholic retreat from the enthusiasm occasioned by migrants within the global circuits of U.S. finance capitalism.

The Ethiopian community does not, in fact, reject American values as they pertain to the accumulation of status and wealth. When Sepha's estranged uncle, with whom he once lived in Maryland but now rarely visits, inquires as to why it is that he chose to open up a store in a black neighbourhood rather than honour the memory of his respectable father by being a working professional, Sepha avoids brining up *his* personal rejection of American values (the American dream) as well as his resignation to the system:

> I never said that it was because all I wanted out of life now was to read quietly, and alone, for as much of the day as possible. I left him and his modest two-bedroom apartment in the suburbs in order to move to Logan Circle, a decision he has yet to understand or forgive me for, despite what he says. (40-41)

Of course Sepha does not tell his uncle, a former tycoon in the highest echelons of Ethiopian society reduced now to managing a string of menial jobs – cab driving in the mornings and parking attendant at Capitol Hill in the evenings – that he does not particularly share the dream of the Ethiopian community that, even in America, still regards their family highly. Moreover, in the eyes of his mother back in Ethiopia, Sepha describes his being in America as "the penultimate accomplishment of a long-awaited dream" (98), noting too that "the first aim of the refugee is to survive, and having done that, that initial goal is quickly replaced by the general ambitions of life" (98) which ambitions, we are told, are characterised by an insertion into the circuits of capital. It is no wonder, then, that *en route* to his uncle's apartment in Maryland, Sepha happens upon a Virginia Community College recruitment billboard with the highly commercialized motto "Taking You Where You Want to Be" (97), at which point he reminisces about his own brief flirtation (sixteen years prior and newly arrived) with assimilatory gestures.

Transfixed by a pamphlet which pictured a multicultural global community of smiling faces walking merrily along manicured lawns, Sepha recalls "a pastoral scene that *at the time* was so appealing to me I was willing to buy into it with no questions asked" (98 emphasis added). With hindsight, Sepha in this remark choosing the temporal marker "at the time",

senses a maturation in himself, facilitated by *his* rejection of American platitudes such as the one promised by the billboard. The pressure to have been an engineer or doctor in accordance with what is expected of him was not enough to stave off his survivor's guilt because for him, at least in the earlier section of the novel, the resignation of one's will to the codifying system of capitalism seemed a bleak trade-off. Be that as it may, Sepha contemplates:

> Here in Logan Circle, though, I didn't have to be anything greater than what I already was. I was poor, black, and wore the anonymity that came with that as a shield against all of the early ambitions of the immigrant, which had long since abandoned me, assuming they had ever really been mine to begin with. As it was, I did not come to America to find a better life. I came here running and screaming with the ghosts of an old one firmly attached to my back. My goal since then has always been a simple one: to persist unnoticed through the days, to do no more harm. (41)

Caren Irr's suggestion that Sepha's rejection of 'American values' is a result of an 'Ethiopian enclave's' temperament therefore ignores the work of the "spiritual education", the epistemic rearrangement if you like, of Sepha who, having refused interpellation into the market, now finds himself not only questioning the ethics and morals of Judith and other opportunistic white people who have invaded the neighbourhood, but also his own complicity, his folded-togetherness with the structures of capital. In other words, by refusing to make a distinction between Judith – the white upwardly mobile university professor with investment assets and inheritance – and himself – a black African migrant who is poor, misses four consecutive months of rent and with no access to state infrastructure – Sepha locates the blame for the condition of Logan Circle on a macropolitical level.

Of course, such a reading ignores the ways in which the personal can be and often is political, but it seems to me that Mengestu's narrative strategy here, if it has any serious fault lines, is to show up the totalizing force of capitalism as uninhibitedly operating with no naturally preferred territory that can be circumscribed within the parameters of identity. At any rate, towards the end of the novel, though Mengestu does not spell it out as such, the reader is able to make the connection to the resignation that comes with the tragic view from which the novel operates. When Mrs. Davis gives a stack of anti-gentrification flyers to Sepha which call for a community meeting to address the injustice of an unregulated property boom at the expense of low-income families, Sepha reflects in the narrative voice: "I couldn't help but smile as she pushed the flyers toward me. I knew that there were patterns to life, but

what I never understood until then was how insignificant a role we played in creating them" (194). Of course, Sepha has to be thinking here about the last time he was given pamphlets, and the ensuing event that lead to his father's death at the hands of revolutionary Leninists. It is for this reason that not long after Sepha notes that people like Mrs. Davis, whom he mockingly suspects washes her face with cartons of milk from his store in order to resist old age, "are committed to battling any and every obstacle that approaches them, regardless of how ridiculous *or impossible*" (195 emphasis added). It is the apparent impossibility of the task of staving off free market capitalism that swings Sepha back into the closed-loop thinking within capitalist realism, the very impossibility of imagining an alternative in which 'the little guy' wins. We therefore have to read the implications of this statement thus: Sepha is not interested in fighting the structures of capitalism because he sees them as overdetermined and always already structuring. Resisting them as they manifest themselves in symptoms of this or that eviction is fanciful at best, and an exercise in futility at worst.

If anything, this might illuminate some of the dilemmas outlined by Du Bois in terms of the place of capitalism in racial time. In his essay, "Of the Wings of Atalanta" he drives home his point about our modern condition, the *conatus* of globality. Using the analogy of Atalanta from Greek mythology, Du Bois shows us how, very much like the story of Atalanta, the American South (then home to a vast majority of black people in the United States) would be tricked into a socio-economic order that was based on principles of unbridled capitalism. "Atalanta is not the first or the last maiden whom greed of gold has led to defile the temple of Love" says Du Bois, warning that it is not "maids alone, *but men in the race of life*, [who] sink from the high and generous ideals of youth to the gambler's code of Bourse" (48 emphasis added). This then leads him to ask the fundamental question: "in all our Nation's striving is not the Gospel of Work befouled by the Gospel of Pay?" (48). Through Sepha, *Beautiful Things* articulates our 'race of life', in the mercantile vocabulary of capitalist globality that has at once appropriated time. The novel is mindful of the ubiquity of globality, from the guaranteed failure of entrepreneurial risk for Mengestu's protagonist, the 'gospel of work' seems surely mediated by a more important ordinance. The sentence straight after the omnipotent 'gospel of pay' will relieve any lingering doubt about capitalism's obliteration of temporality. Du Bois again:

> So common is this [capitalism] that one-half think it normal; so unquestioned, that we almost fear to question if the end of racing is not gold, if the aim of man is not rightly to be rich. And if this is the fault of America, how dire a danger lies before a new land

> and a new city, lest Atlanta [as the black mecca], stooping for mere gold, shall find that gold accursed! (48)

Although he refers to '*Bourse*', the French stock market, Du Bois in his premonition could not back then have known that the kind of capitalism he was critiquing would evolve into free market finance capitalism, the ontology of globality. Yet this is a strong admonition which, unheeded as it has been, results in "the fatal might of this idea beginning to spread" (49). And so it has emerged.

Fast-forward ninety-seven years from the time of the inauguration of this double consciousness, to the very dawn of the twenty-first century. Speaking in Vietnam towards the end of his final term in 2000, President Bill Clinton broached the subject of globalisation and the new world order (Gonzalez 184), and in the process confirmed exactly what *Souls* had previously delineated. Clinton urged his audience to think outside of the nation-state; surrender their will to multinational industry; or at least place their faith therein; to view their situation as out of their control and to thereby make peace with the new era of transnationalism since, he said in his cavalier tone, "globalisation is not something we can hold off… it is the economic equivalent of a force of nature – like wind or water" (Gonzalez 184). This is of course an injunction to cease any attempt to internally question, let alone resist, the force of global capitalism within and beyond the borders of the developing world. Mengestu's novel presents a protagonist who is completely overwhelmed by his circumstances, in keeping with the idea of a force of nature; the novel is preoccupied with that about which little can be done. In a way, it presents the crisis of capitalism as it relates to African migrants, a sense of one's resignation to the environment that they produce and that, evidently, produces them.

Having said that, while the novel's plot structure is itself an embodiment of the type of suspension Sepha feels, the sense of neither coming nor going jammed in the mind of a solitary protagonist, there is a strong move in the end to make Sepha's refusal of ideology a positive event that opens up, without answering, the question of what work a geopolitical novel can and should do (Irr 53). Taking this question to its logical conclusion brings us back the conception of world literature I outlined in Chapter One and have re-emphasised at the beginning of this chapter. Related to this, we can recall Vermeulen's reading of the novels which locates their significance "not in their assertion of their specious autonomy from the market, but rather in their singular inflections, distortions, and refractions of socioeconomic forces" (275). Once again, if a type of 'African' identity is an important marker of subject

formation for the migrants, then identity by itself is not, indeed cannot be, the reason for African migrant disenfranchisement. I therefore suggest that in reading Mengestu's novel, a synthesized understanding of double consciousness which factors in the economic machinations *in addition* to the forms of identity as posited by Du Bois, will provide for a more nuanced reading of the thematic concerns of Mengestu's debut novel.

Far from a preoccupation with identity, *Beautiful Things* rearranges the boundaries of the geopolitical novel to attend to the pressing economic materiality of migrant subject formation. The novel's import lies in its ability to render the tragic with such humorous prose so that even when an entity as bourgeois as the newly established General Logan Statue Association emerges, whose sole purpose is to rid the central statue of human, dog and bird faeces, the local drunkards are imagined as showing "something approaching shock and wonder as they look up at General Logan, whose bronze exterior is now clear enough for [Sepha] to see [his] reflection in, and who looks down on all of us with the glimmering sheen of a privately funded cleaning job" (36). It is such tragic-comedic phraseology that allows Mengestu to evince in his readers the sense of urgency that has befallen the community to the extent that the reader almost feels the accelerating force with which the neighbourhood is being gentrified, page by page, while those who are ostensibly cut off from the lines of social mobility are left behind, certain enough that they too will be erased from the scene along with the general scrubbing clean that is underway.

And still, it is their exclusion from the access to infrastructures of the state that registers most profoundly in Mengestu's novel, precisely because its setting is the capital of the U.S., Washington D.C. On that account, Sepha and his friends once found an encoded psychic reservoir of enthusiasm, however abstract, in the symbolic public monuments of D.C., the White House, the Washington Memorial, and so forth, which now serve as glaring symbols of the debilitating status quo, a reminder of their distance and separation from forms of power which require only that they acknowledge and consecrate power's existence. It is for this reason that after two wandering tourists who stumbled into his shop, Sepha decides to abandon the shop, to tail them for miles as they navigate their way around Washington, happening upon the doorstep of democracy, the White House, which unleashes an avalanche of meditative thoughts about the condition of vulnerable subjects unable to be captured by the American dream.

At one point, Sepha and his friends held the belief that their being in Washington, and hence their proximity to political power, had some metaphorical significance, meant at some level that "a slow day or a bad week didn't matter much then, not as long as [he] could

believe, however foolishly, that just a stone's throw away" there was a higher power to which he could appeal (76). Of course, this portrait of a distant relationship to power and revisionist history simply reflects the extent to which power in a democratic society is dependent on the citizenry for its generative purposes. So, when Sepha encounters the symbols of power in D.C., a seminal moment occurs in which he is transported back to his contemplation of the machinations of power in Ethiopia. Observing a motorcade in the Capitol which brings the bystanders to a grinding halt that necessitates their witnessing of the event, he recalls similar scenes in Ethiopia when there too, the passing of a motorcade engendered "the sense that someone of great importance is passing, and that we are fulfilling our roles as observers" (82). In that moment, power – democratic or otherwise – demands to be sanctioned by those who are governed such that "it seems as if time has been temporarily suspended, the world placed on pause as we wait to return to our ordinary lives" (82). And this is true also of Ethiopia, where "[t]roops used to line whatever route the emperor took hours in advance. They swept the streets clean of beggars, cripples, and trash, and had faithful loyalists stand on the side of the road, ready to bow as he passed" (92).

This is not inconsequential to his overall resignation to global capital since, as Sepha very profoundly remarks "[a]s the police cars vanish, I imagine an entirely empty motorcade whose sole purpose is *to remind people what they are up against*" (92 emphasis added). If globality and its intrinsic capitalist DNA seems unstoppable, then the global figures who represent it are themselves a reminder that to challenge the system at a macropolitical level is at once to contest by oneself as a David in the face of an enormous and immovable Goliath. Under these circumstances, Sepha's muted hilarious response to his eviction notice, which is no response at all, or a stasis that is temporarily resistant, becomes a reasonable way of dealing with the threat of capitalist hegemony. Of equal importance, then, is the suggestion that capitalism's inherent ouroboros cycle signals movements for new political horizons. In a scene much earlier in the novel in which Sepha, rationalising his own decision to remain static in the face of gentrification, recalls that his initial reasons for taking up residency in Logan Circle was partly because it was what his money could get him, but also because of the evolutionary cycle that the neighbourhood represents, in his words, "what it had become: proof that wealth and power were not immutable" (16) and that, perhaps most importantly "America was not always so great after all" (16).

As a matter of fact, from the comfort of his living room, listening to the calamitous sounds of urban decay through the window, Sepha could remind himself that Logan Circle was living proof that the neighbourhood, and by extension the city which is a symbol of

American power, was itself susceptible to precarity. This is his way of loving America, comfortable in the knowledge that it reflects its own contingency, it is a social construction of the highest organising capacity, so that even if he does not experience a changing of the tide in his own lifetime, the epistemic certainty of its ultimately unsteady ontology is enough to give him peace of mind. In view of this then, and unbeknown to Kenneth, Sepha seems to have found a love for America which puts him in an arguably more judicious position to understand the stratagem of American power in the global system. In the meantime, he awaits a democratic socialism that can assuage his resignation to the totalising force of capitalist realism.

I have adumbrated these processes of globality in order to show how Mengestu's novel operates from this tragic viewpoint of globalisation, which is to say, it operates within the infrastructure of globality in order to reflect the totalising force of globalisation. Of course, the novel does not suggest, as Bill Clinton's metaphor implies, that our organized world is at the behest of an inhuman force. Indeed such a metaphor and understanding of world systems is insidious since, as the *Beautiful Things* ultimately infers, our condition is not a naturally occurring one, but rather a socially constructed organization. In other words, the novel turns this analogy on its head, exposing its contingency so that our economic, micro and macro-political shifts within globality are not rendered invisible by the naturalizing language inherent in any understanding of the world as having been created by globalisation.

Chapter Four

Reading the Particularity of Globality: Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*

> Folasadé Savage on the run from a war. Kweku Sai fleeing a peace that could kill. Two boats lost at sea, washed to shore in Pennsylvania ("Pencil-wherever") of all places, freezing to death, alive, in love. Orphans, escapees, at large in world history, both hailing from countries last great in the eighteenth century – but prideful (braver, hopeful) and brimful and broke – so very desperately seeking home and adventure, finding both. Finding both in each other. – *Ghana Must Go*

A general organizing principle common both to *Beautiful Things* and *Ghana Must Go* is the novels' chrono-schism, a non-linear narrative that moves back and forth across time and space with a lyrical blues-like sonic structure that subverts the conventional understanding of linear time, so that Africa, indeed African migrants, are given a complexity and textuality that cannot, arguably, be captured by the rigidity of colonial time, whose linearity forecloses overlapping narratives and temporalities. This is a segue to my reading of Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, within the context of the synthesized double consciousness, and hence double bind, of African migrant writing. Teju Cole's review of *Ghana Must Go* celebrates the novel for having "perfectly pitched prose and flawless technique" wherein Selasi "does more than merely renew our sense of the African novel: she renews our sense of the novel, period" (Cole 2011). I am inclined to follow Cole on this one, even if it might seem grandiose to others, the claim of the revivification of the novel opens up a way of providing a critique of Selasi's debut novel beyond the debates about Afropolitanism. Sure enough, one cannot disregard the numerous articles, international conferences and keynotes dedicated to charting the trajectory of Afropolitanism as occasioned by Selasi. But as I will show, in many ways her novel is not only concerned with the logic of citizenship, transnationalism, belonging and unbelonging at the level of cultural cosmopolitanism, but it is also about the consequences of migrant interpellation into the rubrics of global market capitalism. Far less has been written about Selasi's novel in earnest, except to connect *Ghana Must Go* cursorily to her 2005 essay on Afropolitanism. My point here will be to tactically acknowledge those debates, and move to offering a reading that does not necessarily privilege the subject of identity in the novel (or of the author), focusing instead on its ability to demonstrate a synthesised understanding of the double consciousness outlined earlier. This synthesised invocation of double

consciousness of course involves the structure of institutional racism, but, more importantly, it is concerned with the ruse of capitalism within migrant subject formation understood as an upshot of globalisation, properly diagnosed by Du Bois over a century ago.

"With African writers, as with Indian" argues Selasi in an article published in *The Guardian*, "the critical issue is control: who gets to control what diasporic writers write, which is to say, what global readers read" (Selasi, "Stop Pigeonholing" para. 20). The comment appears in her protest essay "Stop Pigeonholing African Writers", a meditation on the debate about the scope and scale of the subject matter that should preoccupy an African writer, and consequently the responsibilities that come with taking up a position on the global literary stage. This moment of the double bind can be summarised in the following way: On the one hand, if, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Helon Habila takes issue with what he sees in NoViolet Bulawayo as a palpable "anxiety to cover every 'African' topic" as though instructed by the morning's newspapers, then on the other, as Amatoritsero Ede has argued, Selasi stands accused of writing the African experience by means of a problematically limiting bourgeois sensitivity which is unreflective of the precarious status of migrants in the global north. Still, these positions establish two polar analytical frameworks, or rather they are both part of a *prescriptive* framework on opposite ends of the African writing spectrum, which simplistically reduces the artefact to either a scandalous performance of Africa or an inadequate account of the social schema to which a 'geopolitical novel' is expected to adhere. Concerning the latter accusation, Ede maintains that Selasi cannot lay claim to the lives of the people (always aggregated) she aims to capture. Her response to such an argument is simply that her project as a writer is to trouble the designation of 'Africa' in the first place.

This will of course echo the call by Reed discussed in Chapter One, that African writing, what he calls black writing, should question the pseudo-ontological status of the term 'black'. For Selasi, the nation-state is a fictitious idea whose sustainability depends on such categories as 'Africa', which already calls into question the idea of a geopolitical novel (Mistry para. 15). As such, one of the preoccupations of an African migrant writer, as far as Selasi is concerned, is to come to terms with "the institutional machine" that sustains the notion of the nation-state which she describes as being "pretty well-oiled" even though "every now and then, because [the nation-state] is an ongoing myth, that means there will be cracks and fissures and modifications" which demonstrate "the beginning of the moment where the nation is being called into question" (Mistry para. 15). It is not without reason that Selasi holds to such an understanding of the nation and thus globalisation, having graduated with an MPhil in International Relations from Oxford University. Her sense of the world is

therefore not a spatialist one that assumes the world to be a given entity. The world for Selasi is made through a series of political actions through time. Accordingly, she wishes in her writing to attend to the spiritual impulses concomitant with 'world' literature proper, the normative conception of world that Pheng Cheah argues is an ongoing negotiation "among a range of particulars" in literary outputs, which particulars in and of themselves aim to "arrive at the universal" (38). For Cheah, that which is particular in world literature is not, or perhaps cannot be, obliterated by "subsumption under an a priori universal" (38). Rather, particularity becomes part of a 'spiritual whole' through constant negotiation which makes it properly worldly insofar as it *creates* the world as opposed to merely reflecting it as a product of some other more meaningful phenomena which takes place at some other more meaningful level. Under these circumstances, suspending the ethnographic imperative that constitutes the double-bind of African migrant writers, we can endeavour a reading of *Ghana Must Go* that calls into question the very category of 'African literature', resisting the term for its imbedded insinuation that African migrant writers somehow or another stand outside the realm of the universal (Selasi *African Literature* 10).

For if we understand African immigrants to be just as relatable as the white suburban middle class family, Selasi insists, the very idea of African writers becomes, to a certain extent, obsolete (10). With this philosophy as her framework, Selasi seems to be asking, without offering any easy answers, what kind of world does African literature allow us to imagine, especially given the history of colonialism, oppression or economic globalisation? How does capitalist globalisation enact a 'worlding' of the world? Recalling the world of world literature as discussed in Chapter One, we might still ask, can writers supplement the prevailing materialist conception of the world with literary modalities that point us to a more spiritual conception of the world, as per Cheah? The dialectic of the spiritual versus the material world, of course, recalls a key Du Boisian ethos that holds that black people, here African, can cultivate the material conditions of possibility for progress only if they are seen as complex beings, their identity formed within the structuration of socio-economic phenomena produced by the state that cannot contain them as full citizens (Du Bois *Souls* 42). To that extent, Selasi's novel may very well hold out the promise of worldly causality in contemporary globalisation, earning itself a distinct positon as a work of art that can extend our ethico-political horizon beyond the realm of identity.

How, then, can we inch closer to an ethical politics of reading contemporary African migrant writers' engagement with 'affect and potentiality', within or *alongside* the market produced by globalisation? (Vermeulen 276). In the spirit of Vermeulen's practice of *reading*

alongside the market (i.e. globality), my evaluation of Selasi's novel does not intend to judge the extent to which it is either subsumed by or embodies a subversion of global capital per se. Instead, I aim to understand the manner in which the novel vacillates between resistance and accommodation, since it is precisely this vacillation that characterizes the author's imbrication with global capital. Using a slightly different register, Vermeulen's development of a reading alongside the market complements my own formulation of the double bind in globality. I have suggested so far that the adjudication of contemporary African migrant writers must take into account their expressive negotiations of their folded-togetherness with the structures of capital, since that remains the very tension at the heart of the imbrication that I argue animates their works. Similarly, Vermeulen "locates the significance of contemporary works of literature not in their assertion of their specious autonomy from the market, but rather in their singular inflections, distortions, and refractions of socioeconomic forces" (275).

In analyzing the thematic core of Selasi's novel, it's useful to think about the idea of 'over determination' in the general sense, that is, an effect or consequence in daily life which is caused by multiple factors simultaneously, even though only one of those factors would be sufficient to cause the effect. Moreover, such an effect or consequence can be said to be overdetermined if its resultant causes are beyond the control of the subject, and yet, precisely because of this inevitable consequence about which nothing can be done, the subject acts nevertheless as though they are self-willed. From this vantage point, "Kweku dies barefoot on a Sunday before sunrise" (3) is the narrative hook that unleashes a series of events that frame the lives of the characters in Selasi's multi-perspectival novel. Incidentally, this opening line perhaps best describes the sense in which the very existence of the characters is overdetermined within globality. In the case of our protagonist, we are introduced to him through the lens of his "silent and invisible camera man" who is "quietly filming his life" or rather, "the life of the Man Who he Wishes to Be and Who he Left to Become" (4).

As the other family members receive news of their estranged father's death, we are introduced to Kweku's first born son, Olu, the first to learn of his father's death via telephone from his mother in Ghana, already establishing the geography of pain, how an incident can occur 'there' and its consequences felt 'here'. While Olu feels the effects of being "miles and oceans and time zones away", he also feels, more importantly, the effects of "other kinds of distances that are harder to cover, like heartbreak and anger and calcified grief and those questions left too long unasked or unanswered and generations of father-son silence and shame" (5). From the very beginning, the novel gestures towards a concern with the

particularity of character interiority. Distance, here, is not simply a convenient metaphor. We can ponder the thickness of such a description, which works with the grammar of spatial geography, or the inherent qualities of the world as a spatial category, only to complicate the ontological status not only of distance, but also of the world by connecting us to an "inner history", something non material and abstract as Cheah suggests. That is to say, Selasi here provides a normative force of the world that necessarily complicates the merely descriptive categories of space. So for instance, if Bulawayo's minimalist writing did not charitably allow interiority in that direction, or if Osondu's arguably unstrategically essentialist modality forecloses it altogether, we have in *Ghana Must Go* a style of writing that stretches out toward an expression of the transcendental, bending the ethical arch of narratology towards the humanizing project, away from merely a concern with spatial materiality.

It seems, taking this description as one among many such profundities, that Selasi is concerned with those more spiritual aspects of individual suffering vis-à-vis the migrant subject, in other words those that are not easily legible through any common processes of signification, or perhaps even those aspects of the spiritual dimension of the migrant subject which cannot be captured by clichés. Even while the novel infrequently relies on some clichés[27], the author is quite clearly preoccupied with the necessary supplementation that humanizes her characters by adeptly adding to their stories a depth and range, without which they would otherwise be rendered stoic sociological units. The dispositional dimensions of life are at the core of Selasi's philosophy. Her deployment of an expressly 'maximalist' language does more than offer narrative backstories to the characters; it can also be read as the instantiation of the kind of supplementary work that, if attended to, would bolster the narrative structure of a text such as *We Need New Names* or *Voice of America*, for instance.

If in fact, as I have been arguing throughout, African migrant writers are confronted with a double bind, it is between the responsibility of fielding the call from the ethnographic imperative by responding to its exigencies, and deflecting that call, knowing that it implies an undesirable authority of interpellation. The process of deflecting the call enables Selasi to

[27] One could point to the numerous references to Africans enamoured by snow, for instance, which is described as a captivating phenomenon. Also, in one scene in the later section of the novel, the youngest daughter Sadie, during the family visit to Ghana for her father's funeral, meets her extended family for the first time. Sadie is there invited to participate in an African dance, complete with drums and polycentric movements, which could be read as an out of body experience, pulling hard on the seams of the 'return to Africa' trope (254). Still, that would surely be a sophomoric reading of an otherwise intricate and intense moment that thematises the transformative potential of music, mimetic in its rendition. Were it within the scope of this thesis, one would explore the limitations that such a reading imposes, attempting to recuperate it from the rehearsed criticism of Afropolitanism's cultural identitarianism, through a reading alongside the market.

attend to the particularity and the capaciousness of African subjects, both on the continent as well as in Euro-America. Indeed the latter tension, even by its very existence, is located in the same region as the idea of "the culture of globalisation" which, as mentioned in the section on globality in Chapter One, already presupposes "a form of belonging to a moment whose character has been determined in advance" (Cazdyn 10). While the mainstream writer, that is, one who is not labelled 'African' or 'migrant', will at no point between writing her manuscript and seeking avenues into the market, negotiate this particular double bind, it remains precisely the invisible bone of contention for the African migrant writer whether she engages it consciously or choses to neglect its overbearing authority.

Accordingly, and as it relates specifically to *Ghana Must Go*, we must think of the term 'African' in 'African writer' as a reservoir of signification that the author wishes to drain, precisely in order to ask what it would mean to 'fill' it anew with signification, to invest new meaning in it, away from the orders that the telephone line throws at writers. To do so is to understand the reason that Selasi chooses a narrative strategy that can enable her to stage her resolve, to deflect the call that frames African writing in the intrusive manner that it does. By zooming in on the particular, taking care of nano-manoeuvres in her story board, and employing the homeopathy of the melancholic yet celebratory tenor of the blues, Selasi installs a permanent answering machine for the ethnographic imperative, and so negotiates a double bind while, at the same time, questioning the onto-phenomenological status of African writing. This is perhaps one reason why Teju Cole believes that Selasi, in an almost transcendental way, renews our sense of the novel form itself.

The characters in *Ghana Must Go*, even as they are subject to the pitfalls of racialized global capitalism, seem totally motivated by an ordinance of both 'the gospel of work' as well as 'the gospel of pay' as Du Bois' philosophical track so surely outlines. Earlier, I sketched out the general structure of Du Bois' didactic invocation of Greek mythology in his essay "Of the Wings of Atalanta", wherein we are warned that our participation in "the race of life" has brought us to the point at which we relegate our sense of freedom to the mercantile vocabulary of globality. The cautionary remark there being that a financial upward mobility for black people must develop in tandem with a black social consciousness that will safeguard against "the sudden transformation of a fair far-off *ideal of Freedom* into the hard reality of bread-winning and the consequent deification of Bread" (Du Bois 48). But whether or not 'the gospel of work' is always already contaminated by the 'gospel of pay' for Selasi's characters, the novel alludes strongly to two central ideas that give us a better understanding of subjecthood in globality.

The first has to do with relinquishing oneself from the binds of the accident of one's birth, and the other is concerned with a particular notion of success in the lifespan of the migrant project. In advancing these ideas, the prosody, musicality and phraseology in the novel provides a blueprint to its essence. Since Selasi is concerned by what she sees as the pigeonholing of African migrant writers, it makes sense that one of her novel's epigraphs, a haiku entitled "Approximations" by the African-American poet Robert Hayden, should precipitate the narrative:

> Not sunflowers, not
> roses, but rocks in patterned
> sand grown here. And bloom. (Approximations, Hayden 68)

On the one hand, this epigraph quite properly prefigures the thematic concern of *Ghana Must Go* since the poem from which it is extracted, which employs a similar fragmentary logic to the novel, has to do with memory and bereavement, as well as a sense of *being in the world*. It sees the poet develop the theme of the individual subject's relation to subjecthood and death, where 'here' is a reference to a gravesite that bears no flowers, but is nevertheless fertile ground from which even the hardest substance (rocks) can blossom. Clearly, the nod here is not only to Hayden's technical stylisation, but to his philosophy of humanism which resembles the type of universality towards which the novel is angled. In a way, the inclination to the universal is also a nod to Hayden's refusal to have race as the primary marker of literary identity, or to have race and the ethnographic imperative mediate his work. This is epitomised by the following lines that properly corroborate Selasi's own claim to an ethical universalism that if manifested would see her not as an African writer but simply as a writer:

> Reclaim now, now renew the vision of
>
> a human world where godliness
> is possible and man
> is neither gook nigger honkey wop or kike
> but man
>
> permitted to be man (*Words in the Mourning Time* Hayden 78)

We will shortly also see, in the characters of Kweku and Fola, how this 'permission to be hu(man)', to sublate the ethnographic imperative into the domain of the universal, saturates the narrative. From the first page, the author devotes an entire third of the novel to tracing and focalising the last few moments and breaths before Kweku's heart attack and subsequent death, with reflections and flashbacks of his entire life as he realises that he is moments away

from death. Attending to the minutiae in this intricate scene, the novel brings us close to the mind of the character in "those snatches of silence between trigger and action when the challenge of the minute is the sole focus of the mind and the whole world slows down as to watch what will happen", when it is not the *end* of life, "those few, desperate and cacophonous seconds that precede the final buzzer or the long flatline beep – but the silence beforehand, the break in the action", in other words the fleeting interregnum just before death. Indeed, the technique of fragmentation and non-linearity in the novel disrupts the natural attempt to read cohesion in the life of the protagonist, whose life you are reading as you and he are both certain that he is about to die.

By giving us access to his very last thoughts, Selasi is able to highlight that which is at stake in Kweku's final analysis of his own life. In retrospect, he finds that his entire life he had sought simply to separate himself from the master narratives of under development or post-colonial failure that define the scope and limits of people from countries such as his own. In the process, his mission would be to come to terms with his own sense of worth and potential in the world. This will be an important detail to remember when we consider the unyielding notion of success that undergirds the actions of the characters. From the perspective of global finance capital, it is worth noting that this desire to dis-entangle from the metanarrative of nation-statehood and belonging to an Africa, whose movements are determined in advance, precedes the individual embodiments of success that the characters demonstrate.

The inevitability of Kweku's heart infraction thus becomes a key moment to reflect upon other points in his life that have been occasioned by heartbreaks of various sorts, "remembrance and re- other things (regret, remorse, resentment, reassessment)" (21), from his childhood years growing up "living in poverty near the equator" to his improbable journey to America after he receives a full scholarship to an elite medical school, where he meets the woman who will soon become his wife and with whom he will start a family. By means of the microscopic technique, Kweku's unfurling consciousness during this protracted coronary thrombosis, we learn of "the third of his heartbreaks" (27) earlier in his childhood when his younger sister died of treatable TB at the age of eleven, a cause of death that would in the developed world be of national concern, but was nothing more than an insignificant event in the village of his youth. Implicit in the narrative strategy is the utility of novel's free indirect speech, the benefit of a third person narrator slipping in and out of the consciousness of various characters in a fragmentary way across time. This in itself would make the novel pose a challenge to the historical unity and temporal progression of globalisation. The novel

places the reader in the position of co-pilot during Kweku's crash landing, which he will attempt and fail to control. Slowly falling to his death, Kweku evaluates his surrounding, his lush garden in Ghana with dew drops on the grass, which leads him to a memory of the origin of the garden, whereupon he met his carpenter-cum-gardener, introduced to him by "the boy [who] was smiling brightly, possessed of that brand of indomitable cheerfulness" he had only seen in subaltern children growing up possessed of, "an instinct to laugh at the world as they found it, to *find* things to laugh at, to know where to look" (25). This instinct, or the 'brand' of cheerfulness that the narrator suggests comes with it, he had last seen in his sister, as she lay on her deathbed with her mother's hand holding hers, when he had mistaken the instinct for blindness –that someone this destitute should have reason to smile in the face extreme poverty.

Later in America, as a medical student in paediatrics rotation, Kweku would come to realise that loss was in fact a notion "no more than a thought. Which one forms or one doesn't. With words. Such that one cannot lose, nor ever say he has lost, what he does not permit to exist in his mind" (10). His understanding of this notion of loss was consolidated by a practice in the hospital that would discourage parents of "ill-fated infants" from picking a name, simply inscribing "Baby" with the surname on the incubator (9). In fact, many of his American classmates found it "uncouth", since for them, "infant mortality was an inconceivable thing. Or rather: conceivable in the aggregate, as a number, a statistic, i.e., *x*% of babies under two weeks will die. Conceivable in the plural but unacceptable in the singular" (9-10). Yet contrarily, to the African students such as Kweku himself, "a dead neonate was not only conceivable but unremarkable, all the better when unavoidable, i.e., explicable" (10). In other words, the reality of such loss was all too familiar; "it was life. To them the nonaming was logical, even admirable, a way to create *distance* from existence so from death. Precisely the kind of thing they always thought of in America and never bothered with in places like Riga and Accra. The sterilization of human emotion" (10). It is this very sterilisation of human emotion that accounts for his ability to have looked back at his life, for as long as he can remember, without a sense of hurt or even of having been cheated by the accident of his birth.

Instead, his grief comes from the knowledge of the unexceptional nature of *this* particular suffering, the generalizability of the bereavement and pain that is evenly distributed throughout his community, captured in the sensory detail of the lengthy extract that follows, which gestures toward the anxiety about the inconsequentiality of the movements in life – *his* life. In the rare moments in which the memory of his childhood would return to Kweku:

> He would feel only distance, the uncoverable distance, deeply comforting distance, and with it a calm. A calm understanding of *how loss worked in the world*, of what happened to whom, in what quantities. Never hurt. He didn't add it all up – loss of sister, later mother, absent father, scourge of colonialism, birth into poverty and all that – and lament that he'd had a sad life, an unfair one, shake his fists at the heavens, asking why. Never rage. He very simply considered it, where he came from, what he'd come through, who he was, and concluded that it was *forgettable*, all. He had no need for remembering, as if the details were remarkable, as if anyone would forget it all happened if he did. It would happen to someone else, a million and one someone elses: the same senseless losses, the same tearless hurts. This was one perk of growing up poor in the tropics.
>
> No one ever needed the details.
>
> There was the one basic storyline, which everyone knew, with the few custom endings to choose now and again. Basic: humming grandmas and polycentric dancing and drinks made from tree sap and patriarchy. Custom: boy-child Gets Out, good at science or soccer, dies young, becomes priest, child-soldier or similar. Nothing remarkable and so nothing to remember.
>
> Nothing to remember and so nothing to grieve. (28)

What is imperative here is not merely that there is loss, but that in considering his pain, the sense of comfort Kweku attains emerges from having created a distance between himself and the variations of loss that are always already overdetermined, manifesting themselves in the lives of subaltern groups, of which Kweku was once part. To be sure, this is a narrative not only of upward mobility, but of a half-fulfilled manifest destiny, towards which Kweku unremittingly laboured only to find, at the moment during which "he is dying of a broken heart" (89), that there is something missing, some essence unaccounted for. The longer quotation rather starkly reveals a twofold invocation of the notion of 'distance' which, for Selasi, involves not only the sublunary length of space between two separate places.

Distance (or cartographical intimations) takes on a more conceptual and spiritual dimension, with the ability to facilitate alternative temporalities. Note too that, although not readily perceptible on the face of it, the distance described above is between Kweku's present self that has become upper class*ed* and incorporated into the circuits of capital, and the conditions of his childhood that were predestined for the reproduction of tragedy and heart break. Furthermore, this distance is uncoverable precisely because it is informed by a past and the memory of his personal history, which while it cannot be mitigated, provides a useful

point of self-reflexivity about the human potential to cut against the grain of subalternisation, however idiosyncratic such efforts may ultimately be.

That being the case, the comfort that distance brings has to do, in the first instance, with an imaginative capacity to *envision* a remove from a particular set of tragic circumstances to a more quixotic headspace that palliates the inscription of collective colonial memory and individual suffering. It is for this reason that in the "Heartbreaking Winter, 1975" (53) when Kweku receives a letter from Ghana with the news of his mother's terminal illness, his wife Fola insists that they will visit Ghana as she embraces him, sure enough of the imminent demise of the old woman whose last interaction with her son was some years prior, "a horrid argument about whether he should accept the full scholarship or not" (60), to which her talented son responded that she was "jealous" before abruptly departing (60).

Given this backstory, the narrator describes Kweku's response to the news of his mother's illness by invoking the idea of distance in more narrow terms, using a material object (a coat which he never much liked), but mentioning that "for the first time since he bought it, he loved this beige coat. Its thickness put some distance between her chest and his trembling, his wife and his weakness, his quivering limbs. (And his cameraman in position across the room by the window couldn't shoot the crumbling hero for his dull protective coat.)" (55). It is interesting that Kweku's son Olu, upon learning of the demise of his father, is also consumed by the ontological status of distance, although, he is especially overwhelmed by the constitutive immeasurability of 'other kinds' of distances. Be that as it may, the physical description of Kweku's first intimation of distance is of course different to the type of distance articulated in the longer extract, which denotes a more cosmological essence that can also be discerned in Kweku's mother's alone-time ritual when, we are told, she would delight in the quiet of her hut after shooing all seven of her children out early every morning, instructing them to busy themselves, "not for "idle hands" or "early birds" or whatever else the mission had Ghanaian mothers hawking to their *pikin* in those days" (60). Instead, she would lie in her hut "admiring the genius of her runaway husband" (61), the "clever lover" who had built a "clever structure" which felt huge when one laid on one's back looking up at the reeds that arched towards the centre high above her. The only information we are given about Kweku's father is that he had "absconded with the tide in the moonlight (or abandoned her [Kweku's mother], more likely, unable to face her for shame)" (60), but not before he had:

> [d]esigned his mud hut so a girl on his bed would look up and feel *distance*, expansiveness, height. She'd sent them away so she could feel: some distance. Some quiet. Just lie there. Five, ten minutes max […] still, in silence, the waves nearby making what wasn't quite noise […] at peace for a moment with the cards she'd been dealt? A woman born in Gold Coast, in 1941, with the whole world at war with itself. But not here. Here at the edge of the world, the frayed edges. Here frozen in time pounding yam into paste. Fetching fire-wood and water. Watching boats push off, wistful. Above all things wanting to *go*. (61 emphasis added)

In effect, Selasi carefully moves towards an articulation of a form of reconciliation with the overdetermined nature of subaltern subject formation in a globalised context. The price for peace that Kweku's mother must pay is described in the language of a 'giving into' the world and the circumstances in which she finds herself, surrendering to the hand she has been dealt. However, it is unclear how giving into the world is to be reconciled within the ambit of the imaginative potential for alternative temporalities. Nevertheless, by offering us an unrestricted consciousness of the character in such scenes (different to Bulawayo or Osondu's minimalist vignettes but strikingly similar to Mengestu's generous overwriting) Selasi seems to be supplementing the very catastrophe of futility that frames the lives of subaltern groups more generally, but of her characters in particular. The refrain that "no one ever needed the details" thus becomes germane primarily as a cautionary yet somewhat preparatory remark, working to justify the sensory details that ultimately authorises the interiority we are given, and therefore humanises the subjects about whom we read.

This humanising operates such that the larger issues of society, the exteriority if you will, the "one basic storyline, which everyone knew, with the few custom endings to choose now and again" does not obliterate the significance of individual detail. Indeed, this obliteration of detail, the subsuming into subaltern aggregation is Kweku's biggest fear, and the indelible motivation behind his actions. As a result, the effect of an expressly interiorised articulation of his adversities and emotions is that it pushes the spectacle of suffering off centre stage, and in the process allows us to question or challenge Kweku's seemingly fatalistic conclusion that the details were simply all 'forgettable', by virtue of the fact that the same senseless suffering was repeatable a million times over. Yet it makes sense that his conclusion should be so, because after all, the familiar logic of no-naming at the hospital is described, as far he is concerned, as an antidote to loss, precisely because it is a reassuringly familiar gesture "from a warmer third world" where it is not uncommon to find a boy "who tails his mother freshly bloodied from labor (fruitless labor) to the edge of an ocean at dawn –

who sees her place the little corpse like a less lucky Moses all wrapped up in palm frond, in froth, then walk away, but who never hears her mention it, ever, not once" (10). It is the memories of such a "tearless hurt" (28) that nevertheless persist in determining the emotional substance of the novel.

We can also consider another example of this anxiety of dis-affiliation and unbinding from the forces of the nation-state through Fola, born in Nigeria to a wealthy family and rendered an orphan overnight in the wake of internecine violence between the Hausa and the Igbo. Even though Fola and her father are Yoruba, the house staff at the scene of the killings are Fulani (some even Indian), and while the Hausa were targeting Igbos as part of their pogrom, Fola's father is said to have died "anonymous as are all victims", among a body-count of ten dead people, out of which only one was in fact Igbo. Leave alone that she never once attended to the trauma of that loss; at a personal and psychological level, Fola was never able to think through the specificity of the details of the massacre with the image of her father as a victim of a senseless and cruel world (106). Perhaps to her mind, just as it is with her husband Kweku, the occasion of an unresolved loss, in the abstract, does not engender sadness, "as the victim of a third-degree burn, a very small one, will feel nothing of the infection beneath" (27) because of severe damage and a loss of sensation; the event thus becomes "[t]he eschar cemented black over that part of [her] past" (27). This is significant since her assessment of her whole being in the world cannot bypass the fundamental desire to be unwoven, dis-entangled from the structures of third world (African?) constitutions. It is precisely "the indifference of it", another tearless hurt bound to be arbitrarily repeated, that makes her feel that her father's death, since she's the daughter from a wealthy family, was the irreversible departicularization of her subjecthood.

Of course, Fola's coming from an upwardly mobile affluent family does not insulate her from the catastrophe of futility since her own interiority here echoes the earlier anxiety that befalls Kweku when we learn about childhood mortality for those growing up in poverty and the loss of his own sister to treatable TB. Indeed, for Fola too, "*[t]his* was the problem and would be ever after […] that he [her father] (and so she) became unspecific. In an instant. *That the details didn't matter in the end*" (106 Italics in original). Once again, the question of detail as it relates to subject formation is rendered in an impressive display of lyrical symmetry which is reminiscent of a repetitive blues-like melodic hook, when we consider that Kweku himself comes to a similar conclusion at around the same age, even though his childhood is underscored by abject impoverishment in comparison to Fola's. If Selasi worked at the interior character of Kweku to draw attention to the seemingly intractable problems of

subalternity, in order to make the claim that our lives are overdetermined within global capitalism, her writing of Fola intensifies the novel's critique of the metanarrative of nation-statehood in the unfolding of time for inhabitants of such worlds. And so above all, Fola's life until the moment of her father's untimely death:

> [h]ad seemed so original, a richly spun tale with a bright cast of characters –she the motherless princess of vertical palace, their four-story apartment on Victoria Island; they: passionate, glamorous friends of her father's; staff; he: widowed king of the castle. Had he died a death germane to this life as she'd known it – in a car crash, for example, in his beloved Deux Chevaux, or from liver cancer, lung, to the end puffing Caos, swilling rum – she could have abided the loss. Would have mourned. Would have found herself an orphan in a four-story apartment, having lost both her parents at thirteen years old, but would have been, thus bereaved, a thing she recognized (tragic) instead of what she became: a part of history (generic). (106)

But perhaps what's most significant is that her own struggle to dis-affiliate from the nation-state is complicated by the ever reaffirming gestures that she later receives from her classmates and professors in America during her college days, when they would naturalise her narrative of loss, eliding its specificity, such that it became considered part of a greater generic history of an Africa whose propensity for bellicosity was simply a matter of course. In the process of their pitying niceties, she ceased to be "Folasade Somayina Savage and had become instead the native of a generic War-Torn Nation. Without specifics" (107). Now in her later years, fully inserted into the machinery of global capitalism, she finds that it was neither the country of her birth nor the city of Lagos for which she longed, nor even the affluent life she knew, but instead the "sense of self surrendered to the senselessness of history, the narrowness and naïveté of her former individuality" (107) which raises the question of whether or not such a status can be attained in the first place. Her own resignation, quite similar to Kweku's, comes from the fact that attempts to dis-affiliate, whether or not one is cushioned by the prospect of upward economic mobility, signify nothing in the end, since even the event of giving an account of oneself does not account for existence which takes its form from specifics. It comes as no surprise that Fola's resolve, then, is that "if one could die identityless, *estranged from all context*, then one could live estranged from all context as well" (107).

Ultimately, the characters enact the very possibility of (re)thinking oneself as object of knowledge, or as the narrator puts it about Fola's personal-political maturation, crossing "between knowing and knowledge" to arrive at " 'loss' in the abstract" (105) and not merely the physical sense. But if loss in this sense (the very idea of its being part and parcel of the fragile foundations of third worlding created by capitalist globalisation) contains within it a concomitant desire to dis-entangle from its mainspring, then the characters have already been set up for *failure*.

Consequently, if Kweku believes that he will redeem himself by effectively inserting himself into the circuits of contemporary capitalism and its own metanarrative of American dreaming, he is chasing a particular, and particularly parochial, version of success. And if failure is the antithetical parallel to success in the novel, then the thematic core has to do with failure in the lives of people 'for whom failure is not an option' (Bady para. 10). Such a reading, quite apart from the discourse of Afropolitanism, can only emerge when we do not approach the text as if we already understand it, approaching it with the weight of representational schematics, or the rubrics of identiarian politics. I will return to this thematic aspect momentarily, to suggest that *Ghana Must Go*'s particularly economic invocation of globality signals a compelling negotiation of the double bind of African migrant writing.

The blues of the prose and the universal

We can consider the novel's formalist dimension, and the technical means by which it operates with something like a normative conception of 'world'. To remain with the discussion about the novel's gesture towards particularity and interiority, it is important to stress that particularity in *Ghana Must Go* is connected, as I have been hinting, to the somewhat musical element of the prose, the perceptual properties of sound that score the narrative, the pitch (in the musical sense) of the novel's discursive and expressive zone. Selasi seems to score the very signification of the sentences, the typography or semiotic sign system, with a consciously arranged musicality, as though the novel were written to be read aloud. Sure enough, one unexpressed sensory layer of Selasi's narrative technique is the extent to which the writing is imbued with the form of an avant-garde jazz sheet, first cousin to the blues form, which is given prominence throughout the novel. Accordingly, we can even consider the novel's musicality, and indeed its spirituality, at a philosophical register as well. The theorist of Africana philosophy and black existentialism, Lewis Gordon, shows us that the blues can be a philosophical medium through which to understand modernity and what is essentially the crisis of globality. To that extent, the blues for Lewis is seen as a black

form that occasions "the pathologies of dealing with things black in western academic thought," where the tendency is to assume that blues music remains self-referential, stuck in its own 'particularity', where the word particularity marks *an experience*, a condition which is always and forever presupposed by and contingent on blackness. Indeed, for Gordon, "[t]he so-called particular is at times more universal in scope than the proclaimed universal" which he proceeds to call the "potentiated double consciousness" of the blues (Gordon 15). Just like the very conditions of possibility for philosophy, the condition of blackness, metonymised by the blues, is "born of dissatisfaction and the experience of standing on shaky ground" (17). If, for instance, one of the tenets of the blues form is repetition, it is quite easy to see how Selasi, by inscribing recurring lines in the novel, such as the concern with "being a success" rather than merely being successful, such a repetitive modality can reveal new layers about what Gordon calls "the cyclicality of life" in globality (19). Let this melancholic tinge of the novel, its blues soundtrack, stand as the general expression of capitalist temporality, as the novel's method of revealing, through its very form, the instability of globality. If it is true that, aesthetically, "[t]he blues is about dealing with life's suffering of any kind" it makes sense that one way of understanding Kweku's response to the racist incident that alters his life's trajectory, is to understand this general structure of suffering that is imminent to the blues, and so immanent to the novel's existential iterations at a certain hermeneutic level. It is as if Selasi is using Kweku to instantiate the machinations of modern life under capitalist globality.

In the event of reading the novel, the reader *experiences* the musical composition as something rather close to a symphonic arrangement, perhaps wondering if the musical notes she hears are a projection of her own theorems. The reader might yet be vindicated, thanks to the cyber presence of the author, who responded to an invitation to offer a track list for a creative project by *largehearted boy*, a web page which describes itself as "a literature and music website that explores that spot in the venn diagram where the two arts overlap" (*LB* 2013). The website arranges this point of convergence so that "authors [can] create and discuss a music playlist that relates in some way to their recently published book" (*LB* 2013). With the ethnographic imperative suspended, we can read our sense of the present, and our place within the capitalist mode of production, as constituted by ruined time, along the same register that is suggested by the link between the blues and the prose. In her contribution to *largehearted boy,* Selasi cites John Coltrane and Duke Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood" as the song that we can take to function as the abstracted music sheet of the novel. It is no surprise that the song Selasi identifies first and foremost is a jazz composition, an existential

echo of the blues form, as if she wishes to somehow mark a pitch, that the blues is inflected in the cadence of her prose. She foregrounds the act of attuning, also in the musical sense of the word, in her own writing:

> Perhaps it's because I was raised by a music-loving mother, perhaps because I studied piano, cello, music theory – whatever the reason, my approach to prose is informed by my sense of sound. For me, stories are melodies, notes stories, melodies narratives. No piece of music makes this point more clearly than Coltrane's. Those first seven notes of "In a Sentimental Mood" hit my ears like words. I shall never tell stories as well as Coltrane's alto sax, but it's my greatest joy to try.

To read the musicality of the novel is already the practice of a reading of the spiritual impulses of the text, the quality of the novel that refuses interpellation, if only to better account for the temporal disjunctures in Kweku's life. In that way, the very rhythm of the sentences that we read register the general dissatisfaction with the rhythm of modern life, for they constitute an articulation of the kind of temporal politics that is immanent to the blues[28]. I will illustrate this point by zooming in and out of a couple of passages, reading for the spirit of the novel, still alongside the market. At the beginning of the novel, Olu cannot understand why his father was unable to direct the mental wherewithal that he is known to exert in efforts to save other peoples' lives, towards his own dying moments. Perhaps then, the omniscient narrator explains, some last-ditch attempt could have been made to resuscitate him or, an ambulance could have been called, anything to control his untimely crash landing. But instead, Olu is frustrated that his father:

> [d]id nothing. No run-through, no spit-out. Just strolled through a sunroom, then fell to the grass, where for no apparent reason – or unknowable reasons that Olu can't

[28] At this point, I will take a moment to mention the genealogy of the function of the blues by recalling Toni Morrison's literary technique, particularly in her novel *Jazz* (1992), whose narrative structure deliberately mirrors the eponymous musicality. Significantly, Selasi's mentor and literary mother is Morrison herself, who helped jump start her career by offering advice on various draft versions of what would become *Ghana Must Go*. The importance of a normative conception of world is also captured by the structure of blues and Jazz. For instance, Selasi credits the musicality of Morrison's writing for enabling her own literary sensibilities, since *Beloved* was the first time she understood "something about the history I'd been studying that I have never understood before." She recalls about Morrison's writing, if we will permit the overstatement, that "the way the language moved, the music, the underlying music of the language, was so delightful to me. It was just so intensely pleasurable a reading *experience*, notwithstanding the heart breaking subject matter, that I remember thinking not only is this the way that I want to write one day, this is the only thing I ever really want to read" (Selasi *BBC Remembers*).

> divine and damned to unknowing can't forgive – his father, Kweku Sai, Great Ga Hope, prodigal prodigy, just lay in pajamas doing nothing at all until the sun rose, ferocious, less a rise than an uprising, death to wan gray by gold sword, while inside the wife opened her eyes to find slippers by the doorway and, finding this strange, went to find, and found him dead. (7)

Kweku tries to control his death, to deflect the ultimate call of death that is also the wholly, unknowable other, but he instead ends up giving into it. This passage appears in the texture that describes the inheritance of heartbreak and pain. Here, the staccato of a sentence such as "went to find, and found him dead," the monosyllabic writing, in the form of an on beat/off beat sequence that signals the type of personal devastation that is to follow, announces the silence as well as chaos of the narrative to come. We might rather say, the chaos that has existed all along, its particularity supressed by the exigencies of a relenting globality. The slippers, a recurring motif in the novel, will also find their way in another of the children's memories, as "[a] boundary mark. Between "the way things were" and "when everything happened" (41). We remain with this aspect of musical form, to understand the sighting of the slippers as "a moment within which one notices nothing, about which one remembers all" (41). This installation of memory here is significant precisely because the slippers, as a device, function as an access point to the interiority of the characters.

Interestingly enough, on the night of Kweku's life-altering event, twelve-year old Taiwo's insomnia leads her to discover her father sprawled asleep on the couch at four in the morning, liquor bottle in hand. As she moves towards him, she notices that he is not wearing his beloved slippers, and for the first time sees the truth that had been hidden by the slippers, a memory of collective trauma and personal tragedy, of injustice left to fester. Taiwo realises that "she'd only seen the one side of his feet" until that moment, and that "[t]he soles, by sharp contrast, were chafed, calloused, raw, the skin black in some places, puffed up at the toes. It was as if he'd quite literally crossed burning sands barefoot" since he had "gone shoeless for most of his youth" (44). This "unbearable" sight brings on a sense of tremor and insecurity for Taiwo at that very moment, when she comes to see a vulnerable side to her father, the side that contains an unspoken history of pain and suffering (45). It is this very history that will indeed influence the father's own unbearable sense of shame that he has somehow put his family adjacent to vulnerability. Kweku's actions are informed by the lingering effects of his history, his unexpressed and unexcavated past, memory that is buried

but very much undead, and living on in the present. The narrative's historical sensibility is thus accentuated.

Nonetheless, to make sense of the multiple narrative stray shots extended by the attention to temporality, the reader would do well to understand the full import of the blues. This is one reason why Taiwo's very own historical trauma is given its first articulation through the motif of the recurring slippers. Wounded by the perverse sexual violence inflicted upon her in her teenage years by her uncle in Lagos, Taiwo and her brother Kehinde, who was charged with the task of violating his sister as the uncle watched, are said to have 'erected a wall' between themselves and the outside world, a protective withdrawal from society no doubt. Upon discovering that her father has died, Taiwo thinks back to her younger years, and wonders about the condition of his feet at the time of his death. The slippers are thus a way of allowing us entry into Kweku's interiority as well as Taiwo's, to ask questions about the supposed state of his dignity at the time of his dying; was his 'shame' exposed as it was the night Taiwo saw her own history for the first time, through her father's wounded feet? This too relies on a type of musical arrangement. Notice the rhythm of the following passage which describes Taiwo's supressed memory of her absent father, an exemplary scene in terms of the free-form improvisation, the fragmented wheeling around like jazz:

> Time passed and this wall grew higher. Time passed and this wall grew weak.
>
> Until, without warning, a thought. *Where were his slippers?* And again, a week later. The crack in the wall. It was the one thing they forgot to erase from their stories, the disease-carrying mosquito on the evacuation plane: not a moment or a memory, a remembered detail in an anecdote, but *a detail in every anecdote*, omnipresent, the ground. So they missed them, didn't delete them, let them stay where they were, where they've remained, present, latent, fomenting the past. (39 emphasis added)

Just as Kweku's unacknowledged past comes back to ravage his sense of the present, so is the trauma of the twins' past in the present brought into view through lyricism, unfolding the novel's gravitational centre, a meditating on slippers. As far as the narrative technique is concerned, the blues carries with it a history that lives on in the ruined present, thus the novel's lamenting tone also gives us insights about our sense of the present moment in contemporary globalisation. To that extent, the novel reconfigures the idea of Kweku's

personal catastrophe and marks it as a sight from which to understand 'the universal' as accessible through interiority.

Indeed, the narrative tenor of Selasi's novel, the blues form, operates in the direction of temporality, it invokes personal memory, as well as collective histories, and compels us to attend to the condition of the present. This is, in fact, totally in line with the blues: as Gordon remarks, it is the very purpose of the blues (16). Since the "blues is born of suffering", its dynamic power is its relationality to the temporal politics of its past, a dimension of our human existence that continues to frame us in the present. In view of this, then, what we find in the novel, and what emerges particularly from the passage above, is a move towards particularity and interiority that is quite strongly pronounced by the novel's form itself. Recalling Gordon's insistence that, by virtue of its ability to transcend its own particularity, and by evolving "into a more universalising practice […] the blues speaks to modern suffering itself," since black suffering is imbricated with the movements of globality (19). The jazz impulse that informs the novel seems to be a leitmotif in itself, taking on the character of both form and theme in its reverberation of the suffering of the characters. Gordon writes that there are "aspects of the blues that exemplify their own aesthetic sensibility" noting especially that the form is imbued with irony. For him, the melancholic element of the blues "exemplifies an adult understanding of life that is both sober and, ironically, sometimes happy" (19). But this happiness is not for lack of awareness, it is more "a non-delusional happiness often marked by self-deprecation and critical evaluation, the kind of happiness or good humor that is a realization instead of a diversion"(19). Ultimately, Gordon argues that the blues is a medium for literary and philosophical positing. In that case, to the extent that *Ghana Must Go* deploys musicality at the level of form, using the general syntax of the blues, it is primed to take its place among the kind of world making writing that, as I have been suggesting, can point us in the direction of the normative conception of world literature, one that exposes the conditions of its own possibility. I have discussed this in Chapter One, but mention it here only to draw attention to the link between the blues structure of the prose and the access this gives us to the universal.

No doubt, the characters in *Ghana Must Go* are very much within the circuits of upward mobility, yet even in its musicality, the novel seems to be making a commentary about the more sinister movements of globalisation, despite their class position. Kweku Sai, the pedestrian protagonist and patriarch of his family, loses his job as a result of a racist incident at his workplace, which shatters his long cultivated vision of *being* a success, rather than merely having succeeded, which is no doubt linked to the history of his impoverished

upbringing in Ghana. Unable to bear the loss of this disruption of his narrative of success as an African migrant, Kweku walks out on his family one day, which sets off a series of encounters with characters from the past, in the present. But this idea of the migrant's hard work ethic is not the same as the ones who are the immediate benefactors of globalisation, those who have the power to globalise, so to speak. The narrator mentions how the commitment to success as imagined and felt by Kweku is connected to his vocabulary of love:

> His devotion to his profession kept a roof over their heads. It wasn't comparative, a contest, either/or, job v. family. That was specious American logic, dramatic, "married to a job." How? The hours we worked were an expression of his affection, in direct proportion to his commitment to keeping them well: well educated, well traveled, well regarded by other adults. Well fed. What he wanted, and what he wasn't, as a child. (47)

The accumulation of capital is not enough to give the Sais their sense of belonging, it seems there is something that over determines their place in globalisation, relative to the other white suburban families. By way of a brief illustration, we can consider the sense of historical discontinuity that the characters register in the presence of their white American counterparts. Taiwo, the girl twin of the family, has developed a habit, since she was young, of staring into the windows of rich people's houses in the neighbourhood, envying their relationships with one another, which she sees in contrast to her own family's dispersions and emotional unavailability. Gazing at these intimate scenes, Taiwo finds that "[t]he families in the windows were Successful families already, had finished the heavy lifting generations ago, were not building or straining or making an effort; the goal had been reached. They could rest now, calm down" (124). This invocation of a relationship to historical time, an inheritance of a political temporality and generational wealth, is expressed in the interlinear features of this scene. This idea reappears some twenty pages later, when we find that Sadie, the youngest daughter of the family, envies her best friend Philae, who is white and whose family is fully plugged into the machinery of capital, with a history of capital accumulation. Sadie has a kind of transference of her own desires when she sees Philae's family portraits proudly exhibited on their stair way. She compares her own family, with no pictures that point to a genealogy of capital accumulation, and concludes that "they are larger than life—at least hers, Sadie's family, spread out as it is, light diffuse" which stands in contrast to Philae's family, which is described as "*heavy*, a solid thing, weighted, perhaps by the money, an

anchor of sorts? It holds them together, the wealth" and it is also "gravitational pull" (146). Her family is, by contrast, "weightless":

> a scattered fivesome, a family without gravity, completely unbound. With nothing as heavy as money beneath them, all pulling them down to the same piece of earth, a vertical axis, nor roots spreading out beneath them, with no living grandparent, no history, a horizontal – they've floated, have scattered, drifting, outward, or inward, barely noticing when the other has slipped off the grid. (126-147)

Sadie understands the brokenness of her family to be a result of their history, their linage which is out of synch with the temporal progression of past and present, since her own present is constituted by the trauma of the continuing past. Indeed, both sisters compare themselves with wealthier families, non-immigrant white families. The histories of these families, their relationship to an inherited temporal politics, represents a spiritual dimension that reverberates throughout the whole novel, where the author subtly invites us to consider the unequal playing field of capitalism in the everyday. The Sai's history, far from being a continuous accumulation of capital, continues to be a spectre in their present, despite their upward mobility. This is merely one example of an apparently incidental moment when the novel hints at the sense of the stretched out successive events of past present future. It is clear by now that I am interested in the way the novel deploys its form in order to broach the subject of a parochial version of "success" and exceptionalism that is expected of migrants in the movement of globalisation and global capitalism.

American dreaming, a radical disillusionment with capitalism

As mentioned above, *Ghana Must Go* works through the idea of failure for people for whom failure is not an option. Let us now examine a few key moments in the family's unlikely bid to avoid just that. Our surgeon protagonist becomes the victim of a racial injustice when he is forced against his professional advice to operate on a patient whose chances of survival are remarkably slim, but whose wealthy family –the Cabots – insist on her undergoing an appendectomy nonetheless. The Cabots, thoroughly racist, are also major donors to the hospital where Kweku works, and thus demand that he be fired after Mrs. Cabot inevitably dies despite Kweku's best efforts, supervised by the chief of the hospital. To appease the powerful family, the hospital's ethics committee summarily fires their best surgeon whose being black, it seems, infuriates the Cabots who had anyway considered him to be unqualified and inexperienced for the task to begin with. Now out of work and having fallen

from grace, Kweku spends nearly a year "pretending it hadn't happened" (75), leaving every morning as though headed to work, but instead spending his day plotting in the offices of Boston's best labour lawyer, or in the Harvard Law library researching case after case of wrongful dismissal hoping to find legal precedent for his cause. It is this seminal event, the loss not only of his dream job but of a year-long failed attempt to contest his wrongful dismissal within the legal channels that engenders Kweku's biggest shame, subsequently leading him to abandon his family after his son unintentionally sees him being violently evicted from his former workplace by security personnel.

In order to understand the essence of the novel one has to ask, why should Kweku be so ravaged by his dismissal, spending all his savings in law suits throughout an entire year pretending that he is going to work every day, when he could have been accepted in any other hospital in the country? Selasi seems to be suggesting that his commitment to the 'immigrant project', which implies the strictures of capitalist globalisation, is what drives Kweku to the deleterious actions that follow, bringing with it heartbreak, pain and sorrow. The language used to describe his being consumed by racialised capitalism evokes the image of an intractably greedy state apparatus that sucks all labor, migrant and local alike, and demands an abiding commitment to its maintenance, establishing an alienated subject in the process. When Kweku visits his lawyer, Marty, the day he is fired, the latter advises him for the umpteenth time to withdraw his application against the hospital, having unsuccessfully fought it in court many times prior: "They're not backing down, man. It's eating you alive. Kweku laughed mirthlessly. Not them, her, the family, but *it*, nameless, faceless. The monster. The machine" (68). At the same time, we come to learn that in fact Kweku thought of the hospital of his graduate school as 'the machine' when he first got to America; "so awestruck he had been by how well the thing worked. By how shiny, how brilliant, how clean and well ordered, how white-and-bright-chrome, how *machinelike* it was. He loved it. Loved ironing his clothes in the mornings on a towel on the table by the tub, sink, and stove, his white coat, the short coat worn by students. Loved walking, still wide-eyed with wonder, into the belly of the beast" (68 emphasis added). Although Kweku's purview is the hospital, a micro-political entity, the logic of the metaphor of the machinery also supports a reading of the machine as a representation of the macro-political system of global capitalism. Indeed, Kweku loved to take in "the machine-sounds […] to breathe the machine-smells […] to think machine-thoughts […] He felt like an astronaut wearing astronaut-white landed recently and unexpectedly on an alien ship. Newly fluent in the language but still foreign to the locals. And later like a convert to the alien race" (69).

Moreover, when he graduates to finally become a doctor of the sort he was, he would "stride through the white and chrome halls at Beth Israel feeling part of the machine now and stronger for it" (69). But such a strong commitment to the machine seems odd to the American colleagues who, important to remember, were said to have missed the wisdom behind the practice of no-naming at childbirth, and so could not appreciate the catastrophe of futility from which the practice was intended to safeguard Africans. Selasi continues with this image of the rapacious machine to which Kweku gives himself entirely:

> It was a feeling he never dared share with his colleagues, who'd take his pride in the hospital for lack of pride in himself: that he still felt so special, even superior, for being there. For being part of the machinery, when the machine was so strong. In control. The net effect of the show, the audiovisuals, the squeaky clean of the OR, nurse-slippers squeaking on floors, was to communicate control: over every form of messiness, over human emotion, human weakness, dirtiness, sickness, complications. It was the reason, he thought, they built churches so big and investment banks so impessive. To dazzle the faithful. Arrogance by association. The machine was in control. And so he was in control who belonged to it.

In a macropolitical reading alongside the market, the machine functions just as the system within which African migrants find themselves – the very system which creates them as migrants– globalisation. Before long, the system proves that it cannot be controlled, or that control for people like Kweku is coupled with strict limitations, when certainly " the machine turned against him, charged, swallowed him whole, mashed him up, and spat him out of some spout in the back" (69). Still, Kweku's determination to be incorporated into this system is such that when Marty advises him to drop the case, the former would repeat his stirring plea to the point of sounding "like a teenager, a recently dumped girlfriend still desperate to be back in her tormentor's arms" (69). The lengths and extremes to which Kweku goes simply to hold on to the idea of an unbroken chain of success is also linked to his history and its repetition of injustices of various kinds that depend on the accident of one's birth. It is also the very history over which he now wishes to palimpsestically write his new narrative of success, borne over years of dreaming not only for himself, but also on behalf of his wife Fola who gave up law school to raise their children. Until this point, "he had seen it through", piano lessons, an American style McMansion complete with picket fence, a shining job which had him feel like he had:

> Held up his end of the bargain: his success for her sacrifice, two words that they never said aloud. Never *success*, because what were its units of measurement (U.S. dollars? Framed diplomas?) and what quantity was enough? And never *sacrifice*, for it always sounded hostile when she said it and absurd when he attempted, like he didn't know the half. The whole thing was standing on the sand of this bargain, but they never dared broach if after "One dreams enough [for the two of us] […] *he* knew that her sacrifice was endless. And as the Sacrifice is endless, so must be the success. (73)

Indeed, upon first reading, one wonders how Kweku would convince himself that such a mantra should mean destructively investing himself in the fight against a system determined to break him at all costs. But when one considers that for him the only way to dislodge his story from the metanarrative of African subjecthood, and thus to particularise his own trajectory within the inflows and outflows of globalisation was "not by having succeeded, but by *being* a success" (original emphasis 68); then one comes to understand how success in the eyes of Kweku has to do with loving America for its generative powers more than its material properties. To put it another way, Kweku is moved by a version of success that cannot be supported by the ethos of a migrant like Kenneth in Mengestu's *Beautiful Things*, who is confident that one has to love America endurably, advising his impoverished best friend that: "[t]his country is like a little bastard child. You can't be angry when it doesn't give you what you want […] But you have to praise it when it comes close, otherwise it'll turn around and bite you in the ass" (7). Of course Kweku is incorporated into the capitalist machinery in a way Mengestu's protagonist is not. His insistence on justice suggests that what is preventing him from seeking employment following his dismissal is his commitment to the migrant project which is itself underscored by visons and expectations of exceptionalism, the part of the machine that makes one love the generative aspects of it rather than the material substance it can offer. In other words, he is in love with an idea, or better still, a dream, *the* dream, uninterrupted as it ought to be, that attends the possibility of *being a success* rather than merely having it reflected in the form of material possessions and so on. In his final moments, Kweku meditates on his positionality within the entire schema of transnational movement and globalisation, considering whether it would have been enough to have found his way out of Ghana:

> [t]o have started where he started and ended up farther, father and doctor, whatever else he's become. To escape would have sufficed. To be "free", if one wants swelling

> strings, to be "human." Beyond being "citizen," beyond being "poor." It was all he was after in the end, a human story, a way to be Kweku beyond being poor. To have somehow unhooked his little story from the larger ones, the stories of Country and of Poverty and of War that had swallowed up the stories of the people around him and spat them up faceless, nameless villagers, cogs; to have fled, thus unhooked […] for the vastness and smallness of life free of want…(91).

In the end, the heartbreak that Kweku was running from finally catches up with him. He ran from being a generalized subject destined for a life of poverty; to being an immigrant in America with the attendant expectations of such a position; failing to live up to those sets of expectations, which failure drives him back to Ghana for shame – repeating a cycle inaugurated by his own father. But, what is especially interesting is that the last act of consciousness he completes, before he finally gives in to death, is to pause for a moment to admire his house, concluding that, convinced such a life was unavailable to people like him, it would in fact have been quite enough to have dared to dream. For Selasi, it seems the idea of dreaming oneself into existence is what is at stake.

Finally, taking the analytical framework I provided at the beginning of this chapter, it seems to me that, insofar as *Ghana Must Go* presents the crisis of capitalism as it relates to African migrants, it is concerned with over determination, the basic condition of globality, presented to us through an immigrant protagonist who is completely overwhelmed by circumstances about which little can be done. Nevertheless, there is room for hope since in his death, we come to learn the point of Selasi's novel, which is that the birthplace or mainspring of subject formation begins with a dream, not of the sort that espouses a manifest destiny and crippling fear of failure, but the very ability to imagine, dream or rethink oneself as object of knowledge, the epistemic rearrangement I have suggested is crucial within the in the domain of globalisation. Ultimately, the novel aligns a critique of the movements of transnationalism with an implicit questioning of the structure of globalisation and its interpellation of the migrant into the structures of global market capitalism in the manner that I have described above. In the same way that Kweku wishes to 'unhook' his story from the larger stories associated with the accident of his birth, one gets the sense that Selasi herself, by penning a novel that complicates our expectations about an African migrant text, attending not only to the material substance but also to the spiritual domain of interiority, and therefore to the normative conception of the world, wishes to unhook herself as a writer from the strictures of African migrant writing. For better or worse, this is an efficacious negotiation of

the double bind of contemporary African migrant writers with a synthesized understanding of the double consciousness that traces the imbrication of race and economic eventuation.

Chapter Five

Globality, History and Memory in Teju Cole's *Open City*

> It is especially elusive because the source of our information about the mind is itself the mind, and the mind is able to deceive itself. As physicians, I said to my friend, we depend, to a much greater degree than is the case with nonmental conditions, on what the patient tells us. But what are we to do when the lens through which the symptoms are viewed is often, itself, symptomatic: the mind is opaque to itself, and it's hard to tell where, precisely, these areas of opacity are. --- *Open City*

A good novel shouldn't have a point.

--- Teju Cole

It's almost hard to resist the urge to discuss a novel as fragmented as *Open City* without giving into the fragmentary impulse yourself.[29] Yet as we will see, the first lesson the novel teaches us, a counter-intuitive anticipation of its own analysis, has to do with the individual and collective organisation of thought and memory, in those intimate, private or personal histories that are shown to interact with macro political and historical phenomena in over-determining ways. In this chapter, I argue that Teju Cole's debut novel *Open* City, by employing the lexicon and register of cosmopolitanism only to undermine its primary imperatives, exemplifies an efficacious negotiation of the double bind of African migrant writing. To that extent, the novel is also instructive for the understanding of globality I have so far sketched out. Furthermore, I argue that as with Mengestu and Selasi, the attention to detail and interiority in *Open* City, although of a different valence, allows us to complicate our relationship to global capital and at the same time throws the chaos of globality, and global capitalism, into sharp relief. I begin by briefly tracing the processes of memory and recollection along the vertiginous circuits of the Benjaminian conceptions of memory and history, in order to understand how memory, one of the novel's centripetal concerns, finds its fullest excavation in the passage of irreducibility. In other words, because of its many open ends, there is a sense in which the novel thwarts the supposedly transparent nature of postcolonial memory, offering a meta-subjective commentary on itself in the process.

[29] If this chapter ultimately registers something of an evacuated language or tone, it is because, in a rather strange and curious way, I seem to have (over) identified with Cole's exigency, or at least to have temporarily become a resident in his district of productive melancholia. I hope, at the very least, that I am situated in a neighbourhood of intelligibility.

Of all the texts I have considered in this thesis, *Open City* has elicited the most commentary from critics, both specialist and generalist readers. Almost always, the novel's author has his Nigerian background called upon to support a reading of the novel as having some cosmopolitan concerns or qualities. Though not an altogether persuasive line of reasoning, some critics have read it as a celebration, and even demonstration, of the potential of cosmopolitanism (Oniwe 2016 and Patterson 2014) while others, paying more attention to its counter-intuition, have understood it to be undoing the received maxims about the apparently transformative potential of aesthetic cosmopolitanism (Vermeulen 2013, Dalley 2013, Krishnan 2015, Hartwiger 2016). These latter critics, for instance, take the melancholic tenor of the novel, which has a simultaneously affectless tone, together with the solipsism of the narrator-protagonist, to augur well for the double-take that the reader experiences in the event of reading. For them, the novel's topography forecloses the type of cultural understanding that is the apparent upshot of the cosmopolitan encounter with the other. In this chapter I proceed by understanding this view of the novel's circuitous relapse into estrangement and alienation as Cole's way of hinting at the limits of a purely aesthetic cosmopolitanism (Vermeulen 2013). From this perspective, the novel represents a conscious negotiation of globality and the attendant double bind of African migrant writing.

If Selasi's novel began with death, "Kweku dies barefoot on a Sunday, his slippers by the doorway to the bedroom like dogs", Cole's *Open City* operates on a related register, where death overshadows the narrative thread that we are given from the perspective of a thoroughly pensive protagonist. It is significant that both novels, in their intercourse with globality, begin with death. In both novels, death is the activating force or device through which to tease out that which is at stake for the characters. In Selasi's novel, the event of death stimulates a series of fragments in the mind of the protagonist as he assesses his life in his final moments. Interestingly, although not a death bound subject, the concern with death precipitates the unfolding narrative of Cole's book. The much acclaimed novel begins in the middle of a testimonial; "And so" the protagonist Julius recounts, "when I began to go on evening walks last fall, I found Morningside Heights an easy place from which to set out into the city" (3). Prompted by his "busy days at the hospital" these walks constitute "a counterpoint" to the humdrum routine of the protagonist's day job. Over time, the walks "steadily increased, taking me farther and farther afield each time, so that I found myself at quite a distance from home late at night, and was compelled to return home by subway" (5). But, beginning in such a manner, the reader immediately ponders what the preceding clause of the sentence conjugated by the words "and so" could be. He may be forgiven for having

read the entire novel without ever having stopped to determine once and for all what the apparently missing clause is, if he will later return to the enigmatic epigraph that may offer clues. In fact, on closer inspection, the epigraph '*Death is the perfection of the eye*' is better understood as the antecedent clause that contextualises the very first words of the novel, "and so" (3), which works to justify what we will momentarily understand to be Julius's modus operandi, walking through the streets of New York and Brussels while observing the organisation of society as reflected in his environment.

Not unusual for an unmoored fláneur, Julius' observations often pivot around the ontological status of history, and call upon the function of memory in making sense of that history. In the narrative time, it is late autumn of 2006, and our protagonist, a psychiatrist in residence at a New York hospital, is dealing with his feeling a strange sense of ennui and solipsism as he instantiates this function of memory, recounting incidents from his encounters with those he meets during his jaunts in the urban space. He is also recently separated from his girlfriend, whose move to San Francisco put an already strained relationship at further risk, severing whatever remaining chance of salvageable romance there might have been. Related to this, Julius feels disconnected from the people around him, preferring to keep to himself, which allows him to take on the cognitive labour that includes an adept world survey aimed at a reconciliation of a broad historical troposphere. Ostensibly in search of his estranged grandmother in Belgium, Julius undertakes a brief sojourn in Brussels for several weeks, in which he meets interesting people, still labouring to uncover the histories of that city and its inhabitants. The novel's non-linear structure recalls Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, which also features a wondering protagonist as well as a generally unreliable narrator. Both novels engage with the motif of temporality, and both employ a narrative technique that moves forwards and backwards in time. As with Woolf, Cole's novel allows for a cognitive mapping of the intricacies and complexities of memory. His chosen narrative device, a stream of consciousness that enables an exploration of a range of thematic concerns – migration, memory, trauma and globalisation – is its own example of the primary injunction of the novel; that a turn to interiority in literature can give us a thicker sense of the imbrication and entanglements of national and personal histories.

Indeed, Cole mentions in a 2015 interview with Aaron Bady that the novel, which he describes as at once "a book about historical memory, […] an African book, […] a city book, and […] a book about male privilege" can best be understood through a framing device in which Julius has "a series of visits […] to the psychiatrist" (Bady para 12-14). In this way, memory functions as that which the patient draws from, knowing that he is himself a trained

psychiatrist. And what of our relationship to the visits? It turns out that the reader is the therapist who should not, as in psychoanalysis, push their patient to 'coherence' and clarity by demanding that the patient tie up the loose ends of his narratives. Cole also mentions that rather than press for exploration, the psychoanalytic methods would "let him unfold" and "let him circle and digress" knowing that "all the pushing will come from within him" (Bady para. 18). If these facts add up, the novel must necessarily disappoint at the prelocutionary level, where the reader awaits in vain for a moment of respite that will not transpire. What is left to the reader then, is to assess the scene of the event of her reading. Remember too, we are dealing with a patient who is himself a psychiatrist, which therefore implies that it is highly probable that he would unconsciously, or consciously, obscure the path to 'the centre' of his own maze.

Nonetheless, he is in the last few months of his residency training at Columbia University, the most powerful university in the most powerful (global) city in the world, which means that even the mere conditions of possibility that give rise to our protagonist's narrative unfolding are decidedly overdetermined, placing him, and surely us too, firmly within the domain of upward mobility. Our protagonist has a readily available cache of artistic references, ranging from Chardin, John Brewster, Velazquez and Lucille Ball; to music of all genres, but especially classical music, Gustav Mahler, Peter Maxwell Davids, Judith Weir. He is also well versed in matters pertaining to politics, literature and philosophy, from Roland Barthes, Tahar Ben Jelloun to Walter Benjamin, or Edward Said to Gilles Deleuze. So, at the very least, the novel trades in the currency of a cosmopolitan high culture, which in turn makes particular, and particularly bourgeois, demands on its reader. If the novel form itself is already part of a bourgeois historical formation, the more than fifty shades of highbrow cosmopolitanism in *Open City* pushes it further up the ivory tower. The effect is that, by being able to recognise the protagonist's connoisseur sensibilities within a familiar metropolitan semiotic system; or even in our contrived recognition of the dizzying array of the novel's worldly cultural and artistic pastiche, we reify our very own imbrication and proximity to global capitalism. In this way, the reader becomes acted upon by a feedback loop that in fact requires that she recognises her own negotiation with the discursive and geopolitical zoning ordinances that place her, and that establish the very scene in which she undertakes the event of reading this cosmopolitan novel. In a way, we could say that whether specialist or generalist, the reader occupies a distinct place within the analytic situation, that is akin to what Jacques Lacan has named the "subject supposed to know" (*sujet supposé savoir*) (Lacan 232). Lacan, imagining the scene of the therapist's practice, infers that such a

subject (say, the reader as psychiatrist), although structurally in a place of knowledge, does not in fact necessarily possess knowledge as such, but instead has knowledge *projected* (by the patient, Julius, or Cole) upon the space of intercourse between her and her subject. This is what Lacan calls transference, which exists in any situation where there is a subject supposed to know. From the very beginning, the reader cannot escape her position as the subject supposed to know and must thus necessarily confront her lack of knowledge.

If this meta-thematic grid seems, by way of experimentation, to add something new to the dossier of what we call African migrant writing, it is because Cole is propelled by an impulse to develop, as he puts it, "a poetics that extends from villages in the 19th century to cities in the 21st and beyond, all the way to the Afro-futurist horizon" (Bady para. 24). Like Selasi before him, Cole has been assigned the label of an 'Afropolitan' writer, yet he finds the belaboured point about Afropolitanism 'boring', insisting that "a still more interesting question is: what is African writing?" (Bady para. 24). This is a response to the ethnographic imperative that registers an onto-phenomenological question. The rejection of this limited (and limiting) paradigm in Cole's novel marks a departure from what critic Miguel Syjuco calls "the idea of the Great-Fill-In-The-Nation-Novel" (Syjuco para. 13). As far as his own city novel is concerned, Cole's insinuation is that the topographical landscape for the African writer is as expansive as it is for any other writer, and that African migrant writing should reject the inherent restrictions of nationhood, while writers instead point their writerly compasses toward universality. With their compasses thus directed, the destination is not a simple universality, rather, it is a particularity that exceeds the bounds of the nation state framing, and refuses to be delimited by imagined universals such as 'African' or 'blackness'. As an expressive metaphor for this universality, the cosmopolitan cityscape presents itself as a locus for the reflection of all political formation, and the fláneur that we have in our protagonist is engaged constantly in a reading task that recalls key philosophical modalities. Of course, the figure of fláneur is not only apt for understanding how the protagonist walks through the city, but also for his inner state of being, his negotiation of alienation and belonging.

'Dead' but unburied histories, memory and interiority

We can begin, then, by looking carefully at memory and its place in urbanity. Reflecting on Franz Hessel's 1929 book *Spazieren in Berlin* (On Foot in Berlin), Walter Benjamin proposes that for the native of a particular city, the writing about that urban space will inevitably be different from the perspective of one who is writing as a travel writer, since for the former,

the streets engender "a process of memorising while strolling" wherein the book has a special relationship to memory, and for which memory functions, "not as the source, but as the Muse" (*Selected Writings*, 262). Following on from this, in his 1932 essay "Berlin Chronicle", Benjamin himself endeavours to explore the vertiginous nature of memory, along with the fissures that come with every unitary moment of recollection, as he looks back at his own childhood memories, stopping at seemingly unimportant moments in his life's trajectory to vividly recall some semblance of the past (Benjamin, *Reflections, 36)*. In this essay on personal and political history, nothing escapes the critical eye of his mind. Whether it is the streak of light underneath his childhood bedroom door that signals the comforting presence of his parents nearby, or the favourite café in the city in which many of his first essays were penned, or the boulevards he walks that each represent an experience, Benjamin zeros in on the memory, for it reveals the kind of "regimen cities keep over imagination" as well as the extent to which the city, "where people make the most demands on one another […] indemnifies itself in memory" (30). More important, to zero in on his "topographic consciousness" reveals to him why "the veil" that the city and its demands has "covertly woven out of our lives shows images of people less than those of the sites of our encounters with others and ourselves" (30). Now, precisely because he was calling upon memory ("I interrogated my past life") to express the details of his 'chronicle', the essay instructs us to read its interface with the functions of memory, showing us how to proceed with such a reading, as it tests the muscles and power of memory by explicating its precarious nature. All throughout, Benjamin remains dissatisfied with 'informative splinter', those individual memories which are neatly ordered along chronological time and linearity (xvi).

In this same essay about memory, he recounts an incident in a Parisian café in which he experienced an epiphanic moment, whereupon he felt suddenly compelled to immediately sketch out a 'graphic image' of his life. His recently drawn image outlined the intricacies of memory, the interconnectedness and paths that "lead us again and again to people who have one and the same function for us: passageways that always, in the most diverse periods of life, guide us to the friend, the betrayer, the beloved, the pupil or the master" (30). Since it contained vividly remembered segments of his youth, Benjamin was devastated to find that he had lost the graphic a year later. Attempting again to reproduce those graphic outlines, this time in essay form, attempting in other words to *re-remember*, Benjamin comes to think of his life's sketch as "a labyrinth" (31). But, more important, the precision of the metaphor of a labyrinth, for him, lies not in the "enigmatic centre" at the core of the labyrinth, but with the multiple points of entry that lead into the interior (31).

Indeed, he is concerned with the process of remembering itself, the unfolding and exhuming of memory, in order to "analyse the particular movement of his thoughts that gives shape to the materials and isolates the illuminating significance of what is close to the centre of his sensibilities" (xvi-xvii). To this extent, the reader finds that she is herself "involved in a Proustian exercise in creating a past by using the finest snares of consciousness", driven by the impulse to search from lost time. But, as Benjamin concludes in relation to Proust's project to get at memory, "he who has once begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments; no image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside; that image, that taste, that touch for whose sake all this has been unfurled and dissected; and now remembrance advances from small to smallest details, from the smallest to the infinitesimal, while that which it encounters in these microcosm grows ever mightier" (Benjamin 6).

It will be clear in this chapter that, in a related way, Cole's novel deploys memory so that it refracts, twists and turns it, in much the same way as Benjamin's memorial labyrinth. We could say that the movement of memory is, perhaps, something like a rhizome, except that it tends towards a centre rather than refracting as an offshoot from any stable originary branch.[30] Finally, the chapter will also demonstrate how this contemporary yet decidedly unconventional African migrant novel is situated in a dimly lit echo chamber, where the idea of what Benjamin calls "primal acquaintances" finds its fullest reverberation in Cole's lucubration, which aims to destabilise cosmopolitanism while deploying its more artistic features.

In fact, the 'primal acquaintances', very much like the narrator-protagonist, are also the conditions of possibility for Benjamin's memories, since "each of them is a graphic symbol of my acquaintance with a person whom I met, not through other people, but through neighbourhood, family relationships, school comradeship, mistaken identity, companionship on travels, or other such – hardly numerous – situations. So many primal relationships, so many entrances to the maze" (Benjamin 31). Understanding the machinations of Benjamin's

[30] I have in mind the concept of the rhizome as Deleuze and Guattari propose it in their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*. The sense of rhizomatic thinking is in this Benjaminian spirit, since Deleuze and Guattari offer us a way to undo, or at least to question, the rigid binaries and hierarchies of thought and epistemic activity, prevalent in 'western' philosophy. They run an account of thought that does not have an origin, but that moves in multiple directions, at once centripetal and centrifugal. The rhizome is, "comprised not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object" (*Plateaus* 21).

vignettes as a framing device allows us to read *Open City* as a maze of memory, mapped out onto the cityscape whose GPS navigation recalibrates the moment it seems to provide useful direction to an interior. Still, how do we connect the concern with memory in the novel, with the earlier concerns about the normative conception of the world, a hinting at alternative temporalities, that I argue such texts express? To the extent that interiority or an authorial anxiety about particularity and detail unfolds in the novel against the backdrop of memory, and that *Open City* thereby troubles the linearity of capitalist time, this renders the story already operative at a temporal dimension (Cheah 321). The novel underscores the continuity of personal and national histories in a way that reveals how New York, as 'the global city', has an unacknowledged brutal past that is obscured by globalisation's prelapsarian story of 'cosmopolitan' ascension. The counsel from the novel,[31] then, is not simply "this or that singular act of narration but *the continuing power of narration*, narration to the nth degree" (Cheah 321, emphasis added). The narrative compulsion of both the writer and the narrator seems almost tied to the work of memory. As far as the writer is concerned, there is an obvious effort to enter the mind of Julius, and to explore the specificity of its complex and mystifying field. In this way, the novel seems to be answering a call for the capaciousness of African migrant writing, where the challenge is to render art that is not eclipsed by the demands of group representation or the ethnographic imperative within the realm of world literature.

Having outlined the normative conception of 'world' in Chapter One, it would be useful here to reflect on it by way of an example. We can take particularity as one of the humanising agencies in African writing (here, any reasonable definition will do) and consider how an attention to interiority and detail is a useful modality that enables us to open up the question of subjectship. Related to that, we can even understand the novel as, for instance, the literary reification of a similar concern about the particularity of black subjects in American history. Indeed, in his blockbuster book on race in America, the writer Ta-Nehisi Coates advises his implied reader that:

> Slavery is not an indefinable mass of flesh. It is a particular, specific enslaved woman, whose mind is as active as your own, whose range of feeling is as vast as your own;

[31] In his book, *What is a World?* Pheng Cheah mentions that we should not confuse the telling of (and listening to) stories for temporalisation since they take place in time. However, the importance of the story is that it acts as an "analogue for the force of temporalisation because a quasi-epigenetic power of auto-continuation and auto-prolongation is part of their structure" (321).

> who prefers the way the light falls in one particular spot in the woods, who enjoys fishing where the water eddies in a nearby stream, who loves her mother in her own complicated way, thinks her sister talks too loud, has a favorite cousin, a favorite season, who excels at dressmaking and knows, inside herself, that she is as intelligent and capable as anyone. (134)

Here, if we permit the heuristic value of this analogy to stand, we must of course think of the slave woman as metonymic of black subjectivity, so that we understand the text as privileging the project of interiority, which at the same time attends to the spiritual dimension of world literature as described earlier.

So, the spiritual inflection of *Open City*, its preoccupation with interiority and maximalism, allows us to view the character of Julius in his complexity, where his cosmopolitanism, his existentialism and his philosophising mind are ultimately undercut by the limits of his morality and ethics. On one of his walks, Julius comes across a memorial "for the site of an African burial ground" which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was demarcated for the burial of slaves but has today been replaced by "office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies, all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government" (Cole 220). He ponders the historical injustice that continues today in our negligence of the history of some twenty thousand black New Yorkers, and agonises that "I had no purchase on who these people were whose corpses, between 1690s and 1795, had been laid to rest beneath my feet" (220). There is also, much to his annoyance, a history of opposition to earmarking the grounds for commercial development, which Julius is uninterested in, noting with a sense of late capitalist pragmatism that "there was certainly no chance that six acres of prime real estate in Manhattan would be razed and redirected as holy ground" (221). Rather than attend to the unrealistic contours of his wish fulfilment, his enduring concern upon locating this monument is "*the echoes across centuries*, of slavery in New York" (221, emphasis added), especially given that, routinely, hordes of corpses continue to be discovered in preparation for commercial building projects. The site, in fact, reflects a "palimpsest, written, erased, rewritten" (58-59). Hence the rewriting, predominantly in the form of commercial development, elides a long history of violence, repression and exclusion, where black bodies were used, and no doubt continue to be used, as the foundation for the establishment of capitalist America and its plunder. On account of the site, Julius contemplates how difficult it is:

> [f]rom the point of view of the twenty-first century, to fully believe that these people, with the difficult lives they were forced to live, were truly people, *complex in all their dimensions as we are*, fond of pleasures, shy of suffering, attached to their families. How many times, in the course of each of these lives, would death have invaded, carrying off a spouse, a parent, a sibling, a child, a cousin, a lover? And yet, the Negro Burial Ground was no mass grave: each body had been buried *singly*, according to whichever rite it was that, outside the city walls, the blacks had been at liberty to practice. (221-222, emphasis added)

Here is an echo of the writerly compulsion to name the specific manner in which the violence of the past landed and continues to land on overlooked subjectivities, reverberated by Coates' figure of the slave woman. Particularity, in this way, seems to give a human face to grand narratives of historical suffrage, which is not necessarily to say we can therefore recognise ourselves in others. Rather, the gesture towards the vocabulary of particularity and specificity has to do with the truth that the other is capable of having the capacity for a fullness of life and depth of soul which has its own specific shapes and ambivalences and whose sensory range stretches far beyond the immediately available markers of their identification. What is perhaps most compelling about the novel is its zeugmatic yoking of form and content; that the stream of consciousness, fláneurie and memory are not only narrative devices, but also the thematic centre of the self-referential text. Unlike a text which clearly signals the dialogue from the activity that is described, the absence of quotation marks in the novel reflects the authorial concern with continuity and, in its consequent lapse into ambivalent textuality, refuses the reader any pretentions to 'certainty' through a codified sign system.

We can remain on the novel's aspects of form and how they bear on its content. Because of its unbroken, continuous slippage from one scene to the next, minor details that give us knowledge about the setting only emerge much later, as with the fact the Julius is Nigerian, which appears some thirty pages into the novel when he recalls being "the only other African in the room" (30-31) as a guest at Dr. Gupta's opulent house in Madison, where the Indian-Ugandan doctor confesses his lasting disdain for Africans. The deferral of such superficial details, which appear subtly or indirectly, and the advance of other more intimate details instead, suggest that our protagonist vacillates between full confession and hesitation in his self-narration. He can, in this way, withhold and reveal information about his view of himself and of the world; and insofar as his memory unfolds with the narrative, the plot of the story turns out to be – reflecting Benjamin's maze – the story itself.

Perhaps this is what James Woods refers to when he writes in his review of *Open City* that the plotless plot of the novel is "this enigma of an illuminated shadow" (Woods para 6). Indeed, the withholding of the character's personal information in a sustained way throughout many pages suggests that when "they finally arrive at a curious angle," the details and manner of narration compels us to believe that "the book began before we started it" (Woods para 6). This is not unconnected to the fey vitality of memory. Cole is concerned with the nature of continuity, so the novel begins before we start it just as our lives begin before we can remember them. And in a similar way, when we meet a 'primal acquaintance' for the first time, they have already lived a life before we knew them. In the last instance, the fascinating dimension to memory and history is the possibility or impossibility of knowing the past, and at the same time being formed through that past that we don't altogether know. This is one reason why, in light of his journeys, Julius can utter such things as "I have searched myself" (147). His feet take him far and wide across New York, to Tower Records, Central Park in upper Manhattan, the financial district in lower Manhattan at the site of the gaping wound of 9/11, to Harlem, to dinners with friends, or movies and concerts alone, making his ambulatory movement the basis for narration.

It's worth remembering Mengestu's narrator-protagonist Sepha in *Beautiful Things*, who is also withdrawn and somewhat emotionally unavailable. Sepha is comparably poor, but he is also somewhat of an intellectual highbrow. Nonetheless, what distinguishes him from the protagonist of *Open City* is his relationship to time and mobility, or mobility in time. Time, and the 'inevitable' changes that come with it, seem to move around him in a different way to Julius, moving, that is, around his fixed location. Indeed, Sepha notices the physical changes in his surroundings brought on by gentrification, 'choosing' to remain fixed in his derelict shop, unplugged from the networks of global capital. In other words, the physical distance between his shabby house and the shop he owns, constantly exposes him to an impermeable material world outside the four walls of his house or shop. His piercing social analysis occurs from a distance, so from an inner world, enabled by his pushback to a globality that, as Cheah has written in relation to globalisation and global capital, "incorporates people and populations into the world-system by tethering them to Western modernity's unrelenting march of progress and capitalist time" (19). By contrast, Julius' ambulatory movements, being those of a cosmopolitan fláneur, means that he moves *through* time, fully incorporated into the global city's imperatives.

He is not, unlike Sepha, observing from a fixed point. The "incessant loudness" he experiences during his walks, exposes him to thousands of other people who move through

the city, yet he finds that "the impress of these countless faces did nothing to assuage [his] feelings of isolation; if anything, it intensified them" (6). And while the primal acquaintances he is bound to encounter during his walks, as well as the monuments, paintings, music, churches and so forth, each serve as the random stimulus for his roving mind, he is also at times the perfect surrogate for Cole's insemination of his own principles, and the ideal modality through which to situate the author's own positioning within globality.

Because of the novel's thematically potentiated narrative structure, the protagonist can contemplate recondite subject matter, from the opaque status of memory, to the lasting effects of dis-remembered histories, and their place in globality. *Open City*, not least because of it affectless tone, is a clear "warning for readers not to mistake aesthetic success for a cosmopolitan achievement" (Vermeulen 45), despite its itinerary of general globalising protocols such as cosmopolitanism and the transparency of intercultural understanding.

In the previous chapter, I outlined the concept of globalisation, linking it to globality and capitalist realism and its 'end of history' permutations. One point about this framework bears repeating, that is, by drawing on globalisation's preferred narrative of itself, only to complicate it with historical detail, a contemporary African migrant text such as *Open City* operates "as a spectre of sorts", revealing the specific manner in which globality functions "to occlude its originary violence", thereby "exposing its laboratory excess as façade" (Krishnan 677). In other words, by charting the trajectory of 'the global city', understanding its branding as the global centre of opportunity and job creation, for instance, the celebratory gesture of globalisation and its epiphenomenon – cosmopolitanism – is shown to be a ruse, as the novel suggests, since globalisation masquerades under the guise of difference only "as a means of disguising its reconfigured brand of violence, which seeks to exploit and enlarge divisions through a cleaving of memory" (679). It is for this reason that, upon discovering the African burial site, Julius tracks a consistent genealogy of violence and plunder in New York, from the transatlantic slave trade, through the prominent role it played as a port of entry for slave ships that were sold elsewhere. Under these circumstances, New York has always been, in economic and financial terms, 'the global city', by having relied on and profited from exploitation to lay the very foundations of its modern contours. *Open City* attends to the forgotten history of colonisation, supressed as it has been by the narrative of contemporary borderlessness, that established it as the supreme site of the American 'FIRE economy' (Finance, Insurance and Real Estate) in the first instance:

> This had been a busy mercantile part of the city in the middle of the nineteenth century. Trading in slaves had become a capital offense in the United States in 1820, but New York long remained the most important port for the building, outfitting, insuring, and launching of slavers' ships. Much of the human cargo of those vessels was going to Cuba; Africans did the work on the sugar plantations there. In profiting from slavery, the City Bank of New York was not unlike the other companies founded by merchants and bankers in the same time period – the companies that later became AT&T and Con Edison emerged from the same milieu. (162)

We must understand the worldly causality of *Open City* as counterhegemonic, since Julius, through his critical commentary and criticism of the organisation of society, is an analogue for a postcolonial critique of global capitalism. At the same time as he is unrelenting in his social commentary, however, he is positioned in such a way as to give the appearance of an accommodation to a somewhat exclusionary highbrow cosmopolitanism, inviting the well rehearsed and indexed criticism the term has accrued. By bringing together these two entities, the protagonist' active participation in the in-flows and out-flows of global capitalism, while simultaneously indexing the violent legacies of colonialism and imperial domination, the novel presents us with a useful literary figure that we can call, as far the relationship to late capitalism is concerned, the "postcolonial fláneur" (Hartwiger 6). In this way, Julius' estrangement is linked to a cosmopolitan sophistication, yet that sophistication entrenches the mechanisms through which power is regulated (Krishnan 679), operating as it does in global contemporaneity, in an invisible form.

Since, as I have shown in Chapter One and Two, the double bind of African migrant writing cannot be solved, it can only be negotiated, our task is to determine the extent to which writers play the binds that are attendant with their positionality. *Open City*, in a similar vein to *Beautiful Things* and *Ghana Must Go*, subtly creates the sense of an invisible force that is operative in society. Recall that, in *Beautiful Things*, the invisible force is the seat of government in Washington D.C., the doorstep of democracy noted in the references to the White House, the Lincoln memorial and so on. In *Ghana Must Go* it is the idea of the (global capitalist) machine that organises life, and according to whose authority the characters move in time and space. In *Open City*, a related tropological device appears halfway through the novel when New York is afflicted by a bedbug problem that preoccupies the author. The bedbugs in the novel are also described in an evocative language that creates the impression of a rapacious creature or an ominous body of organised terrorism directed toward the

population of New York. Julius identifies the bedbugs as "the unseen enemy that carried on their work" (173). The metaphor of "the old-fashioned bedbug, a miniscule red-coated soldier" that continues to thrive "even in the age of dramatic epidemic", is a useful way to understand the problem of a lingering force that refuses to be a thing of the past, living on with an implacable ability to replicate and remain an agitator in private life.

There is an important clue in the narrator's syllogism. For instance, Julius notes that "[e]ven as the terms of transnational conflict had changed, a similar shift was happening in public health, where, too, the enemies were now vague, and the threat they posed constantly shifting" (173). Rich or poor, everyone is susceptible to "these tiny, flat creatures […] involved in a kind of low-grade war-fare, a conflict at the margins of modern life" (173). To be clear, I am not suggesting a one-to-one symbolism between the bedbugs in the novel and an invisible force which is, arguably, global capitalism's concentration of wealth and power. That would too easily marshal the author's insistence on ambivalence for my own contrapuntal reading alongside the market. What I am interested in, however, is the fecund dimensions of the metaphor that might indicate Cole's overarching concern with historical memory in *Open City*, the dis-remembered parts of history that have an invisible yet palpable continuance in the present. In this case, we might find recourse in Julius' reflection on the language of "the period style" of a medical journal at the turn of the twentieth century, which describes the nature of this invisible force of that era– the bedbugs. Reflecting on the medial bulletin about bedbugs, Julius notes that "it drew its real power from a gradual accumulation of assertions, which created an intense and oppressive image of the creature under study […] the fear of being attacked by the unseen" (175). One might reasonably wager that memory is also the unseen, or has at least has been relegated to such a status in contemporary globality. In the same way that the bedbugs come back to haunt one and all in the global city, memory, which has been expunged from narratives of globalisation, haunts all prospects of the global city.

The past in the present

Earlier in the novel, Julius recalls a trip to the movie theatre for a screening of *The Last King of Scotland*, a film about the brutal dictator Idi Amin. The representation of brutality in the film makes him wonder "as Coetzee did in *Elizabeth Costello*, what the use was of going into the recesses of the human heart. Why show torture?" (31). There is a sense in which, as Andrew van der Vlies notes in his review, "the novel is more autobiographical than it allows" (para. 7), which makes sense when we consider that Julius' ruminations can be read as both

the result of "a felicitous montage" or simply "inconsequential contiguous bits" (Vermeulen 47). The idea that Julius' irreconcilable characteristics are a 'felicitous montage' should be seen alongside the novel's self-referential program. In that case, if indeed Costello has been read as a proxy for some of Coetzee's concerns, Julius' conflation of the boundary between the author and the protagonist suggests that, in such micrological movements, Cole is himself pushing at the boundary between author and protagonist in his own novel. It is for this reason that Julius meditates on the film and wonders; "is [it] not enough to be told in imprecise detail, that bad things happened?" (31). The author's earlier concern with particularity, as I have it adumbrated above, is expressed here in the form of a rhetorical question, since Julius' incessant appetite for detail is quite clearly the answer to his own question.

And yet, in those rare moments when he is sometimes satisfied with the details, Julius finds he is consumed by other excesses. He recalls another film set in Africa, that he had seen the previous year, "about the crimes of large pharmaceutical companies in East Africa" (29) which had left him "feeling frustrated, not because of its plot, which was plausible, but because of the film's fidelity to the convention of the good white man in Africa" (29).[32] He objects in rather strong terms to this film's representation of Africa as forever in need of Euro-American tutelage and unable to manage its affairs without a form of Euro-American intervention as its only hope of redemption.

For Julius, what was especially objectionable was the film's insinuation, which affirmed his lingering concern, that "Africa was always awaiting, a substrate for the white man's will, a backdrop for his activities" (29). Sitting down to watch *The Last King of Scotland*, which is what activated his reflection of the previous film, Julius does so with an expectation that he will be anguished by the biopic. Anticipating his dissatisfaction, he notes his reluctance and remains "primed to see a white man, a nobody in his country, who thought, as usual, that the salvation of Africa was up to him" (29). As a matter of fact, staying with the elision of the author/protagonist boundary, Julius' assessment of both African films resonates with Cole's very own positionality – his own *Weltanschauung*, expressed in the author's now popular 2012 essay "The White Saviour Industrial Complex", published in *The Atlantic*.[33]

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[32] Since the narrative present is 2006, the film in question is very likely *The Constant Gardener,* released in 2005, in which a white couple from Britain go to Kenya, where the wife attempts to uncover the malpractices of a large and powerful pharmaceutical company. In the end, both are murdered, as though suggesting a kind of martyrdom.

[33] Cole tweeted: "The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening". The essay was a response to accusations that Cole was racist for having written the series of tweets, responding to the sudden obsession with the idea of 'saving Africa', as petitioned by the popular documentary *Kony 2012*. In a matter of days, the film was viewed on YouTube more than

Cole's frustration with the Hollywood-style film *Kony 2012*, a documentary intended to raise global awareness about Joseph Kony, the Ugandan war criminal and fugitive indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), is almost inseparable from Julius' thinking on representation and the notion of the white man's burden. In the essay, Cole invokes John Burger's statement that "A singer may be innocent, never the song", to lay the grounds for his argument:

> One song we hear too often is the one in which Africa serves as a backdrop for white fantasies of conquest and heroism. From [the] colonial project to *Out of Africa* to *The Constant Gardener* and *Kony 2012*, Africa has provided a space onto which white egos can conveniently be projected. It is a liberated space in which the usual rules do not apply: a nobody from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a godlike savior or, at the very least, have his or her emotional needs satisfied. Many have done it under the banner of "making a difference". (Cole, "White Savior Industrial Complex", para. 12)

The author's formulation of the eponymous turn of phrase "White Saviour Industrial Complex" in this essay, articulates precisely Julius's concerns with representation in *The Last King of Scotland*, and gives substance to the idea that Julius is, to a significant extent, quite deliberately made in the image of his creator. Nonetheless, to suggest a simple correlation on such grounds would surely be remiss, yet when such nano-devices are taken cumulatively, one cannot avoid the feeling that *Open City*, as Hamish Dalley notes, "seems less like a representation of its protagonist's consciousness than a vehicle for extraneous historical knowledge" (28) or detail. Such detail or historical knowledge (read memory) requires the radical openness of the memorial labyrinth so that the narrative stream can glide from one memory to the next, one experience to the next.

If we pay close attention to the run-on sequence of disjointed thoughts, we can identify the moments in which Cole seems to be ventriloquizing Julius to express his own writerly concerns, exemplified in Julius' investment in the project of particularising. It is no surprise that Julius transitions from the biopic of the African dictator, to the dinner party at Dr. Gupta's, where he remembers feeling especially troubled by the latter's hatred of

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twenty-six million times; and millions more dollars poured into account of the humanitarian organisation called *Invisible Children*, under the hashtag #StopKony (*The Guardian 2012).*

Africans, directed to one and all. Julius is therefore stunned by Dr. Gupta's indiscriminate disdain, noting how "the details of my background, that I was Nigerian, made no difference, for Dr. Gupta had spoken of Africans, had sidestepped the specific and spoken in general" (Cole, *Open City*, 30). This important connection to Cole's project of particularising can easily be missed, since it is interwoven into the banal and everyday movements of the protagonist, so that it seems the author is claiming full responsibility for his assertion that "a good novel should not have a point" (Cole, "The White Saviour Industrial Complex", 2012). At any rate, it *does* have a point, and its gist is inscribed in its very form.

Accordingly, when Julius hears undecipherable chants outside his apartment and endeavours to investigate, we are taken from a description of the sounds, a women's protest, to an encounter with a blind man who triggers a thought on Igbo mythologies of the origins of humankind; swiftly rerouting to a contemplation of the plunder of early Dutch settler colonialist in New York; which in turn directs us to a thought on the generational extermination of Native Americans at the hands of said settlers; which veers off to a memory of his patient, a professor at NYU who is working on the effaced history of Native Americans in New York. This transitions into a discussion about global warming and climate change, drifting to the protagonist's qualms about representations of Africa in mainstream media, and finally culminating in a subway scene, where two white out-of-towner kids have a Fanonian "look-mom-a-Negro" moment, all in one tightly held together chapter of nineteen pages.

Fecundity is key for Cole, hence, the run-on technique can be understood as the first checkpoint to the novel's zone of utterance, where our attitude to opacity, continuity, uncertainty and irreducibility, determines whether we are granted a pass to its vulnerable domain, where memory is tested and often found to be less innocent than it presents. It is for this reason that Julius recalls, shortly after his father's demise, a conversation between him and his since estranged mother, during which she told of her childhood in Germany. He describes this unusual experience as "the afternoon she decided to take me with her into her memories" (79). Significantly, the idea of being taken *into* her memories, as though they remain isolated and far removed from the present, is immediately counterpointed by his intuition of the enduring power of historical memory, recalling how her tone was that "of someone continuing a story, as though we had been interrupted and she were simply picking up a dropped thread" (79). But he is not, we might say, being taken into any faraway place, he is already situated in the terrain of her memory. The over-determining authority of the continuity of personal history, "the simple surprise at this sudden willingness of hers to lay the past bare" exposes him to the essence of her past beyond the "idylls", where the

particularities of her story reveal "a story of suffering", and where her narration strikes a nerve "about a deeper hurt" (79) of which "she had no memory" (80). Born in Berlin soon after the Soviet offensive, Julius' mother "couldn't have known the absolute destitution, the begging and wandering with her mother through the rubble of Brandenburg and Saxony. But she had retained the memory of having been aware of this hard beginning: not the memory of the suffering itself but the memory of knowing that it was what she had been born into" (80). And since "she'd been born into an unspeakably bitter world, a world without sanctity" her response to traumatic events such as the passing of her husband, Julius' father, would simply be "to displace the grief of widowhood onto that primal grief, *and make of the two pains a continuity*" (80, emphasis added). Apropos the notion of continuity, it is significant that Julius is named after his mother, Julia, who herself must have had her name "taken from somewhere in the family line, too, a grandmother, perhaps, or some distant aunt, a forgotten Juliana, an unknown Julia or Julietta" (78). True to the form of memory, but truer still to the protagonist's pressure for particularity, Julius attempts to "imagine the details of that life" (80) and finds that "it was an entire vanished world of people, experiences, sensations, desires, a world that, in some odd way, I was the unaware continuation of" (80).

Throughout the novel, Cole sustains one main point worth ironing out, namely that, epistemic rearrangement is attainable only through my negotiation with my past, and insofar as memory is a recuperation of the past *in* the present, I find that I am myself the eraser and erased of this 'palimpsest' at the very moment that I scratch at its surface. Thus, erased and erasing, I carry within me the illegible violence and depravation (in the form of loss) of my past, attenuated only by my confrontation with its complex generational overwriting. I can only have positive causality in the world by changing how I know myself as object of knowledge – about which more in a moment. This is, as it were, the spiritual attention paid to African migrant subject formation, different, for instance, to the acquiescence to an unquestioned spatio-temporality that sometimes stymies *We Need New Names* or *Voice of America* which operate more seamlessly under the rubric of geopolitical literatures within the world republic of letters. Coming to terms with the complex nature of memory is, therefore, Julius' ultimate epistemic programme, which accounts for his experiencing a suspension of time, feeling about the journey 'into' his mother's memories that "[t]he afternoon was time taken out of time" (81). In another instance, Cole extends this inside/outside description to strike harder at the point at the opacity of memory and our always already interpellated condition.

Reading the psychiatrist reading himself

Chapter sixteen of the novel presents some of Julius' most astute epistemic rearrangements, and deploys the opacity of memory and the mind to startling effect. This section of *Open City* introduces yet another concern central to the novel, namely, that we cannot fully extricate the self (the 'original' self) from the worldly self (the 'reflected' self). Attempting to "avoid the drama of death, its unpleasantness" (183), Julius had refrained from seeing his moribund friend, Professor Saito, whom he now phones, only to be told that he has died. In his last interaction with Professor Saito, Julius "wanted the old man to give [him] words of wisdom" (180), but was instead left deeply disappointed by Professor Saito's mysterious last words about going "into the forest" and wanting to give himself to death at age ninety. Interestingly, the chapter opens with death, thereby supplementing our understanding of the novel's epigraph and, at the same time, working with a doubling technique that exposes the folded togetherness of history, the structural duality and imbrication of the self and other, the self, that is, reflected in the other. Julius goes on a walk to Morningside Park via a post office errand, to "keep the self-pity [about the passing of his mentor] at bay" (181). The entire lexicon of the extended scene is in the idiom of a cosmological dualism, establishing a literary rendezvous where the essence of interiority converges with the socio-material exteriority. In this scene, everything merges into one, creating an undifferentiated ambiguity between objects, people, and Julius himself.

Using the grammar of convergence, Julius feels that "my griefs interfered with one another", as he grapples with the mourning of his beloved friend, also considering that his now engaged ex-girlfriend is unavailable for emotional support. Underscored by a psychoanalytic tenor, the imagery in the chapter suggests an imbrication with the environment about which the protagonist is somewhat anxious. Walking through the park described as "a world of brown and black, grey and white" Julius says, instructed by a psychoanalytic modality, "I saw a hawk. Or, rather, he saw me" (186), presenting yet another block upon which the novel's message on perspective and positionality rests. As he walks into a less popular quarter of Chinatown, where '[e]veryone in sight seemed to be Chinese, or could be easily taken for Chinese" Julius observes the only other black person in the vicinity, "a man stripped to his waist" (189) who is vigorously applying oil to his upper body, as he moves into the shadow of the nearby statue of Lin Zexu, the 18th century Chinese antinarcotics activist memorialised in this part of Chinatown. The dark silhouette cast by the shadow of the monument overshadows the man such that, gradually, Julius is unable to distinguish between the man and the monument. Eventually, the man's body glistened,

"neither more nor less than when he started, and he himself was like a bronze statue" (189). Although Cole sustains the trope of convergence throughout the novel, it is significant that it is animated in this scene, in this specific part of Chinatown, where all the notices and signs are written in Chinese characters with no accompanying English translation, and where the language spoken is not English. Indeed, Julius happens upon a bric-a-brac shop that captivates him, and whose sighting gives him yet another experience of time outside of time, a heterotopic dimension where the real and the imagined fuse. Transfixed by "this cornucopia", Julius walks into the shop, there to have his transcendental moment:

> Standing there in that quiet, mote-filled shop, with the ceiling fans creaking overhead, and the wood-paneled walls disclosing nothing of our century, I felt *as if had I stumbled into a kink in time and place*, that I could easily have been in any one of the many countries which Chinese merchants had travelled and, for as long as trade had been global, set up their goods for sale. (191, emphasis added)

The collapsing of space and time in this scene through the vocabulary of spatio-temporality is interesting, for it properly presents the continuous force of memory, the past and present, the past *in* the present, sameness masquerading as difference. In this scene, a Chinese marching band has a procession in the street. Julius hears something like a dirge that reminds him of his boarding school days in Lagos, a distinct melody that was sung during assemblies. Amidst the spread of tchotchkes on the dusty racks, he is mesmerized by this tune, and experiences an intense moment which engenders his dense meditation about his psychic life, in which everything is unified, merged it seems, from the start, into a trippy sequence of reflections.

The scene signifies the convergence of the psychology of the individual and the urban consciousness, as the marching band, observed "from the eerie calm of the shop" "trickled beyond the bronze Buddhas that sat looking outward from the shop's windows" whereupon "[t]he Buddhas smiled at the scene with familiar serenity, and all the smiles seemed to me to be one smile, that of those who stepped beyond human worries, the archaic smile that also played on the lips on the funeral steles of Greek kouroi, smiles that portended not pleasure but rather total detachment" (191). Even the band itself merges with the environment in which it moves, marching "farther and farther into the noise of the city" (192), where it is integrated into other indistinguishable soundscapes.

Having begun with the death of Professor Saito, we are, by the chapter's end, re-routed back to death in Julius' memorial labyrinth, but via the vertiginous *mise-en-abyme*,

again animating the otherwise understated zones of subject formation. The longer quotation that follows reifies the narrative import of memory, place, time and death in the novel, which at the same time renders it a rather appropriate scaling of the novel's form. Julius is uncertain whether the dirge he hears – if it is a dirge – "expressed some civic pride or solemnized a funeral" that he was prevented from attending, and yet:

> so closely did the melody match my memory […] that I experienced the sudden disorientation and bliss of one who, in a stately old house and at great distance from its mirrored wall, could clearly see the world doubled in on itself. I could no longer tell where the tangible universe ended and the reflected one began. This point-for-point imitation, of each porcelain vase, of each dull spot of shine on each stained teak of chair, extended as far as where my reversed self had, as I had, halted itself midturn. And this double of mine had, at that precise moment, begun to tussle with the same problem as its equally confused original. To be alive, it seemed to me, as I stood there in all kinds of sorrow, was to be both original and reflection, and to be dead was to be split off, to be reflection alone. (192)

The world around him seems, now, like a unitary sequence of reflections, blurring the border between reality, the tangible world, and representation. Important to remember, Julius has, in the first place, taken this walk to placate the pain of thinking about death. But he ends up confronting a crisis about life. In keeping with the novel's politics of citationality, the protagonist's mirror imagery here recalls Foucault's delineations of time in heterotopic space, useful for our biopolitical reading of subject formation. The appearance of this contemplation of the self at this moment in the narrative must be seen in the light of the protagonist's stilted, yet strangely regenerative, self-awareness. Before he stumbles upon this heterotopic space, which makes him feel as if he is within New York, outside New York, Julius goes to the post office to send his friend Farouq – to whom he'd taken a liking when they'd met in Brussels – a copy of Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism*. There he meets the black clerk who is enthusiastic about a moment of mutual identification, unreciprocated on the part of Julius, on the basis of their both being black. The clerk refers to Julius as "brother" and praises him for coming from "the motherland" and for having "something that is vital" which makes Julius "a visionary" and "a journeyer". Thereafter, unsolicited, he waxes poetic about "the catalogue of pain", of "our ancestors" and other such collectivising notions about black people (186). The clerk then reveals that he is a poet, and proceeds to invite Julius to one of

his poetry sessions, at which point Julius, already exasperated by the socially inscriptive power of race, politely agrees, despite having no intention of acceding the invitation. In fact, he immediately makes a mental note to avoid that particular post office. Earlier in the novel, our protagonist has a similar confrontation with a taxi driver in New York who was offended by Julius' condescension, insisting that "I'm African just like you" (40), while Julius feels "in no mood for people who tried to lay claims on [him]" (40). By the time that he ruminates on the ontological status of the self in the above long quotation, he has been numerously subjected to identification in advance. Nonetheless, the point is not that he resists relatedness and identification per se, but that the environment always already establishes the modes of identification that exceed the boundaries of the intending subject, and so Julius cannot attend to the specificity of his own subjecthood since, in his many encounters, he is known in advance of himself. As a general principle, the novel seems to suggest that, since I am comported by that which you levy in my general direction, I cannot free myself from my anxiety about the relational binds that produce me, without freeing myself from the conditions of social and psychic life. To free myself from such conditions, to seek only to be an original without reflection, is to give myself to death. And since "*Death is a perfection of the eye*", death, erasure, and closure, become associated "with an optic that is too intent on perfecting, completing, and purifying whatever comes into its purview" while Julius' cognitive map "keeps the bits of life that it collects radically imperfect, incomplete, and therefore […] visible and undead" (Vermeulen 52). If this analysis seems rather jarring, it is because it forces itself, here, in order to connect to another illuminating heterotopic moment in the novel, where Julius' empathetic capacity as the cosmopolitan African migrant is called into question. The dialectic between reflection and original in the longer passage finds its trace in this earlier scene, where Julius, at the request of his then girlfriend to accompany her and her church organisation, visits a detention facility in Queens, where Saidu, an African migrant from Liberia, has been detained going on two years. Saidu asks Julius "Are you African?", and on hearing 'yes', he shares his story in all its detail during the forty-five-minute visit: a civil war broke out, his family was murdered, he escaped to Lisbon where he lived and worked menial jobs for months before saving enough money to fly to the US on a fake Cape Verdean passport, where his journey would end at terminal four. After his long story, the scene ends thus:

> Come back and visit me if I'm not deported.
> I said that I would, but never did.

> I told the story to Nádege on our way back into Manhattan that day. Perhaps she fell in love with the idea of myself that I presented in that story. I was the listener, the compassionate African who paid attention to the details of someone else's life and struggle. I had fallen in love with that idea myself. (70)

Now, although Julius does not believe Saidu's version of events, he uses the occasion to cultivate an alter ego, one that can connect with others in meaningful ways through listening. But, of course, this alter ego is simply an unreal image of himself, created as a bridge to a type of self-understanding (and love of self) that otherwise does not exist. So, when we finally arrive at the 'point-for-point' reflection in the mirror scene, the combinatory nature of the self as established relationally has already been set up. The protagonist's primary mimesis cannot be disavowed or restrained merely by a deliberate act of mind, which leaves his entire contemplative procedures and the self that he takes himself to be, at the behest of involuntary social and psychic conditioning. Importantly, this is also the only moment in the novel in which Julius is given to articulated feelings of love, but that love is directed only towards an image of himself. While the heterotopic space in the form of the detention centre brings into focus the brutally dehumanising nature of policed frontiers and borders, the interplay between belonging and unbelonging, citizen and immigrant and so forth, it is the mirror as heterotopia that picks up on the idea that the 'I' that is myself as created, which is to say, the self is constituted, in the first place, as an idea. Julius must therefore experience his mirror moment and the sublimity of what he knows to be a heterotopic experience, as that in which everything seems "simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (Foucault 24). Indeed, the mirror space is that in which I see myself reflected in the mirror that produces me as, at once, original and reflection. Foucault considers subjective becoming in heterotopic space, which is situated somewhere along the axis of a utopia (an imagined place and time) and a quite other space "a sort of mixed, joint experience", suggesting the mirror as one such experience (24). To the extent that the mirror is "a placeless place", it resembles a utopia because, in looking at it, I "see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror" (24). In addition, however, the mirror reflects a heterotopic dimension "in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy" (24). In a way, Foucault's analysis quite accurately accounts for Julius' psychic crisis of self-recognition:

> From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (24)

We are indistinguishable from our fictive selves, and the only sense of self we have is of a doubleness of consciousness which, the novel seems to suggest, is palliated only by death, at which point we become merely a reflection of society, vulnerable to erasure as in the metaphor of the palimpsest. The layering of space and time in the novel invites us to a disorienting road-trip in the direction of subjecthood, with detours past the figure of "the postcolonial fláneur" (Hartwiger 2016); recklessly swerving at the juncture of the fugue (Vermeulen 2013); and stopping only momentarily at the figure of *dérive*, akin to the fláneur or fugue, but distinct in character only to the extent that the *dérive* is not simply concerned with walking around in a footloose fashion, but absorbs "the spiritual intensities, the psychological intensities of a *particular* space in the city" absorbed, in other words, by "those places in the city that are vortices of energy" (Cole, *City as Palimpsest,* 2012). I say 'momentarily' stops, but its power is in its spirituality, and as we have seen, the novel refuses to be *about* one thing, let alone the concern with migrant identity in the diaspora. Within the context of globality, a novel such as *Open City* invites us to apply pressure to globalisation's preferred narrative of itself as a naturally occurring phenomenon that emerges outside of the violent histories of colonialism and imperial capitalism. The maximalist overwriting that Cole deploys, while it may at times appear like a vehicle for extraneous historical knowledge, also works in favour of the author's project of particularity, the details that I have argued push us closer to the proper essence of world literature. Indeed, our protagonist is dissatisfied with at hand explanations for abstract experience such as memory, personal and historical, and so finds himself circumnavigating a complex memorial labyrinth that leads him again and again to primal acquaintances of various kinds, where he can revisit the multiple sites of becoming. The constant relapse into 'route recalculating' at the very moment we seem to get

to the interior of our protagonist's cognitive map, is the novel's own way of discouraging self-satisfaction with the completeness of memory, recalling Benjamin's views about memory, particularly in urban space, that s/he "who has once begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments" (6).

Remaking the World: towards a conclusion

> This group of gendered outsiders inside are much in demand by the transnational agencies of globalization for employment and collaboration. It is therefore not altogether idle to ask that they should think of themselves collectively, not as victims below but as agents above, resisting the consequences of globalization as well as redressing the cultural vicissitudes of migrancy. It may be a material challenge to the political imagination to rethink their countries of origin not only as repositories of cultural nostalgia but also as part of the geopolitical present, to rethink globality away from the U.S. melting pot.
>
> Gayatri Spivak – *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*

> If postcolonial studies have succeeded in provincializing Europe, it still exerts one imperial dominion in its full and undisputed splendour, namely, this strange idea that the Globe is the equivalent of the natural world.
>
> Bruno Latour – *Onus Oribis Terrarum*

When Fredric Jameson writes that 'it's almost easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism,' the formulation of this indictment surely comes across as facetious (76). Yet it is quite in keeping with Jameson's style to instil a profound lament in such a complaint, an expression of the disenchantment with the feeling of total helplessness in the standoff against capitalism's seeming obliteration of the imagination and collective imaginative potential. Jameson's formulation above is suggestive for the argument I have been making, for it reveals the undecided status of two significant entities in globalisation and African migrant writing, namely, the world and the imagination. What conception of 'world' does Jameson have in mind in his suspicions about capitalism? On one level, it could signify the world that is tangible, the earth conceived in spatial terms, which can be represented in dystopian texts of various kinds, for instance. But there is also at least one other sense of an 'end' that follows, the end of the spiritualist world, the normative world where imagination resides. This would account for the failure of the imagination at the exact moment when it is called upon, in the face of mounting evidence that the system of global capitalism has run its course, to produce alternatives to capitalist 'realism,' this present blockage in our temporal horizon. Jameson implies that globality means to have been seized by capitalism, which has established globalisation as a quasi-permanent state in the collective consciousness.

The works that I have examined in this thesis present us with subjects that are inescapably entangled by the restrictions of globality, smacked down by the juridical determinations of migrant life, citizenship and historical memory, a past that bleeds into the present. As opposed to embracing the terms 'African literature' or 'African writer', even with qualifications, the writers who seem to be suspicious of the call of the ethnographic imperative, attempt to redirect the call. But they find that the feature of the Incoming Call Restriction on their device cannot deflect or evade the call that is being made, since the writing is already called into being by its very existential relationality, that is, in terms of its radical alterity in the arena of world literature.

It is important that the analysis in the thesis has centred on the intensities and tensions of the negotiation of the double bind of African migrant writers. Yet, at no point should one assume that the double bind is resolvable, that the authors can at once detach from their ethical relation to their context and seek refuge in a notional world of letters, despite their conscious protestations and good efforts. For the double bind of African migrant writing is at the level of an aporia and is thus irresolvable, a call gets issued into the circuit about a particular matter of civil recognition, for instance, and the reception of the text is established irrespective of the response. Thus, when a writer such as Cole deflects all calls and experiments with form, positing a highbrow fláneur as a protagonist, he is praised for adopting a narrative strategy that is unusual 'for African migrant writing'. The ethnographic imperative appears when the authors decide whether and how their works will interact with the world of juridical predispositions, where the ethnographic imperative resides, which constantly runs into the world of the more dispositional dimensions of life, where particularity and subjecthood are animated.

As I have attempted to show, this position of African migrant texts, their existence in world literature, implies something that can only be called a double bind, since it is not merely a contradiction or antinomy, but more like an *experience*. The double bind cannot be evaded, for the mere fact that it inhabits the world literary arena and finds its expression in the multiple calls that are issued, with anticipations about a range of political demands or formalist expectations that predetermine the artistic modalities of the work. The pervasive sense in which this experience of the double bind, the experience of one's position of radical alterity in world literature, might be one reason why Sofia Samatar mentions that a way to think about African literature is to consider how it is perennially in the processes of 'becoming nothing,' and forever constituted by a lack:

> We know that all literary works are copies, but *African* literature is a copy in a way that obliterates it (Ouologuem, Camara Laye, whatever, choose your plagiarism scandal). All literature is political, but *African* literature is political in a way that makes it cease to be literature (it's "too political," "didactic," etc.). All literature is produced to suit a market, but *African* literature is produced to suit an illegitimate, inauthentic, outside market (it's always in the wrong language). Its market also makes it nothing… (New Inquiry para. 3)

Samatar is clearly articulating the various flickers of the double bind of African migrant writing, the interpellating structure that I have attempted to theorise in relation to globality. The approach of an ethical politics of reading that I have proposed is significant for our theorisation of African migrant writing since it interrogates the very thing that we often take for granted, namely, the world. I have argued that a more normative account of the world, the one Cheah has convincingly advocated for in *What is a World?* is the appropriate means by which to understand the temporal disjuncture of globality.

Importantly, globality as I have discussed it seems to figure the imagination as central to the movements of capital, since the decimation of temporality destroys with it the ability to imagine an alternative to global capitalism and institutes a bleak political unconscious. If this seems to bring into view a pessimistic account of the present, it is because a long line of thinkers and writers from across disciplines have been drawing our attention to the discursive value of a normative account of 'world', which adds a grey hue to the inventory of literary and philosophical positing about temporality. It is important to analyse the ontology of 'world' because, after all, the world is the conceptual plane of our imagination, the entity in which everything resides, and upon which the geopolitical networks facilitated by capital manifest themselves.

The stakes of the world are brought into focus by two exemplary essays by Bruno Latour that I suspect can help us think through the temporal anxieties of globality in some concluding form.[34] Latour has a good sense of the vanishing present, of the temporal mode as I have been discussing throughout this dissertation. He stresses the distinction between two senses of world, one that is essentially materialist, and another that takes on what resembles a

[34] For a wider discussion of the consequences of conflating world and globe, see Bruno Latour: "On Some of the Effects of Capitalism" (2014), and "*Onus Orbis Terrarum*: About a Possible Shift in the Definition of Sovereignty" (2016).

more spiritualist and normative dimension. As far as Latour is concerned, the world which we inhabit is a type of "first nature" and anything that comes from within, capitalism, assumes the character of "second nature" "in the sense of that to which we are fully habituated and which has been totally naturalised" (1). He intuits a "transcended world of beyond" that has come under pressure from the more "poor world of below," which seems to have taken the place of any transcendental signifier of eternity or salvation, it is now the economic, specifically the capitalist, that governs *as* first nature (1). Latour's argument reveals the extent to which our political and literary lexicon has yet to fully contend with the onto-theological status of this second nature-cum-first, the appropriation of time and space by capital as I have discussed in the Introduction as well as in Chapter One. Nonetheless, he is especially frustrated by a feeling of 'total helplessness' in the current temporal politics which have stifled the political imagination, with capitalism as "the figure of fate" that is predestined, its enduring triumph reified when we bring up temporality. But, if an alternative and more just world is at stake, it seems the fate of capitalism, despite its association with science and progress, has a rather different temporal dynamism. Tripping up on itself, capitalism defeats the logic of its own temporal force because of its ruination of imaginative potential. Where the temporal dynamism of science lies in its power and ability to open up various possibilities and alternatives across space and time, such that the more possibilities there are in terms of the impact on the world, the greater the horizon of progress appears (4). Yet, zooming into the paraconcept of 'second nature' or capitalism, possibilities seem to quickly diminish to the point where there is simply no other response to the question of capitalism's lifespan than the adage 'we're capitalist' (4). And this is still connected to our conception of world, since it is fate that is hauled in to do capitalism's bidding, to justify the thrust forward, towards human progress, and thus to arrest the possibility of any alternative social formation:

> Why is fate, the old *fatum* from which no human can escape, always raised in connection with modernisation – modernization that defines itself, or at least that used to define itself, as *anti-fate* par excellence? There must be something so poisonous in the idea of capitalism that it has such an effect on thought as to render any alternative unthinkable. (4)

Latour is going to suggest a set of theses, taking up the challenge of updating Marx's original eleven theses in *Theses on Feuerbach*, that end with the famous thesis eleven "Philosophers

have hitherto only interpreted the world, the point however, is to change it". Since the idea is that we are dealing with a self-regulating, self-maintaining, automatized force that is beyond human intervention, Latour places emphasis on the role of the imagination, on epistemic rearrangement as one possibility for change. This will recall Du Bois, who is also concerned with the relation to temporality and the imagination under capitalism during its early permutations, as I have elaborated in Chapter Three. Du Bois' philosophy of double consciousness converges with contemporary theory where the temporality of globality is concerned. The various cultural time zones that are established by the free market and neoliberal state formations recall the sense of racial time that preoccupies Du Bois, also along economic lines.

For Latour, if capitalism is to be transcended, if there is any remedial action to be undertaken, it will have to be on the order of collectively "looking at how capitalism, that is, thinking with the concept of capitalism, affects thought" (8). He goes on to state that "if you have failed, it's not capitalism you should revolutionize but rather your ways of thinking. If you keep failing and don't change, it does not mean you are facing an invincible monster, it means you like, you enjoy, you love, to be *defeated* by a monster. This is a case of […] *pneumopathology*, a form of spiritual masochism, not of courage" (9 original emphasis). Here, Latour is among those who have refused the logic of globalisation, nipped it in the bud from its infancy stages in the post Second World War period ushered in by modernity which, as discussed in Chapter One, also prompted Hannah Arendt to complain about a "thoughtlessness" that has pervaded our political discourse.

Ultimately, as I understand Cheah, Spivak and Scott, who repeatedly give prominence to the temporal miasma of the post 1989 moment, the 'world' of world literature has everything to do with imaginative potential. When capitalism seems no longer to have an active enemy, both Cheah and Scott put their finger on the free market as the instance of a temporal moment that appears to have occasioned the *beginning* of an end, rather than the end of ideology. This beginning of our sense of being stranded in the time of capitalism occasions the destruction of the imagination. I have also argued, at least implicitly, that the selected African migrant writing examined in this thesis employs the general syntax of the literary investment in a spiritualist account of the world, away from the merely spatialist and materialist. In so doing, the texts negotiate the double bind of their positionality, which can often impose materialist and predetermined schemas, prearranged writerly and readerly protocols. If we are prepared to read alongside the market in the manner I have suggested, the writing invites us to imagine the ontological status of the world in which the characters are

situated, and equally, the world which situates the texts and the readers – globality. I have tried to argue that the works offer us a discursive and imaginative space from which to consider some of the economic implications of migrant life framed by global capitalism. This happens in a rather radical way when the writing enters the personal and tender zones of utterance, where the personal attributes interact with the juridical predispositions of migrancy. In doing this, significantly, the writing seems to suggest a deferral or diverting of the call of the ethnographic imperative which would have migrant writing respond to all manner of calls that are put out, all of which seek to delimit and make recognisable so-called 'African' literature. The source of the call can even be quite specific, though it does not mean that it is singular. As I have suggested, our reading practices as they pertain to world literature and African migrant writing seem to be weighed down by a curious temperament, that being, they seek to make individual voices intelligible according to a particular structure of recognition. As we have seen, this anticipated rubric, or the unique stage directions established for contemporary African writing, the narrowly conceived socio-political problems it is expected to address ahead of its arrival, also has the effect of subsuming Africa into the logic of commodity markets.

But, the reader of *Ghana Must Go*, for instance, will have to wonder about the measures that Kweku takes when he is met with the life-changing event of his unfair dismissal. Entering his consciousness and wandering in its enigmatic topography (which is facilitated by the novel's musicality), the reader might come to terms with the full impact of temporal insecurity in the lives of African migrants. I have shown how a conscious silencing of the call of the ethnographic imperative constitutes a negotiation of the double bind in Selasi's novel, which is written with the aim of exploring interiority and subjecthood. Ironically, this focus on the dispositional dimensions of life can offer more illuminating views about the juridical predispositions in life, our sense of being violently thrust into state formations of various kinds, networked by global capital. The novel's illumination of the macrosocial from the perspective of the intimate and personal, as I have argued, reflects the structure of the blues form, which brings together rhythmic elements and existential philosophy in the same way that the novel strives to take on a musical prosody. Accordingly, the novel is operative on multiple fronts of the world literary landscape. By focusing on interiority, Selasi is able to performatively demonstrate how the supposed particularity of African subjectivity is in fact more universal than the supposed 'universal' of the Euro-American subject. Yet all of this is irreducible, unverifiable, and depends on an intimate

reading that cannot be accommodated by the materialist or spatialist accounts of world literature, forever predetermining meaning and framing 'interpretation'.

Just the same, the reader of Mengestu's *Beautiful Things*, which is concerned with the permanent presence of loss, the lingering effects of memory, being stranded in the present, will surely wonder about Sepha's 'decision' to live a life that remains unplugged from the circuits of upward mobility, totally disillusioned with the present, globalisation and capitalism as ruined time, and so totally helpless as to resign himself to a life of destitution. But along his abyssal consciousness, thanks to the interiority afforded, the reader might come to the realisation that Mengestu is concerned precisely with the present of global capitalism, and with the imaginative potential of African migrant writing. Indeed the sense of temporal uncertainty that befalls the protagonist illustrates the devastation of economic globalisation.

Curiously, the works by the authors who have chosen to distance themselves from the label of 'African writer' all underscore the temporal force of memory and the past. Cole's *Open City* proves exemplary in calling into question globalisation's preferred narrative of itself, by taking memory as the gravitational centre of the text, and exposing supressed histories of violence and capital accumulation. As I have shown in Chapter Five, Cole is himself active in his deflection of the call, and so uses the literary traditions that are at the disposal of *all* writers, unencumbered by urgency, techniques that allow interiority to the point where the writing assumes a non-teleological refrain such as 'a good novel should not have a point', Cole's retorted pushback against the ethnographic imperative. The temporal politics of the texts as well as their form thus turn out to be a useful vantage point from which to access the world making potential of this writing.

By my estimation, what is truly suggestive about the concept of the double bind is that it complicates the writing in such a way that a text such as Bulawayo's, which engages the ethnographic imperative, cannot be dismissed simply as a performance of Africa, as Habila and others discussed in Chapter Two have suggested. At the same time, Osondu's text, which is also necessitated by an urgency, clearly demonstrates the limits of the acquiescence to the ethnographic imperative. Indeed, in the case of Bulawayo, the negotiation of the double bind reveals how our reading practices benefit when we suspend the pre-established modalities about the supposed transparency and intelligibility of African migrant writing. The double bind, in theory, establishes a situation in which both options are right, or both wrong, or in which there is a right and wrong option; either way, one cancels the other, leaving the subject in something of an impasse. So, the question, 'do you consider yourself an African writer?' is taken as the unquestioned pseudo-ontological category that it is, at the

very moment the writer accepts its foundational premise. But, who is to say that these authors cannot, with strategy, essentialise themselves so that they can profit from what Spivak once called strategic essentialism, using one's positionality for a 'scrupulously visible' political purpose? If Bulwayo and Osondu understand their writing to be necessitated by some urgency, the task of the reader is to enable the representation to pass through the corridor of opacity, going for the spirit of the writing, a move whereby one reads the writing for its minimal difference from the market, or the socio-political world that the writing is expected simply to reflect. In this move, readerly imagination enables one to attend more readily to the singular and the unverifiable, the element of the text that escapes the meaning of perspectival simplicity, a reading that would put the text on the column of African writing's world-making potential, its spiritual impulses alive and dynamic. We might yet see, for instance, that while the child narrator in *We Need New Names* is less capable of exploring the vertiginous dispositions of life, Bulawayo supplements this strategy with an adult narrator whose general syntax, the economy of words, creates unstable openings at the level of the imagination. In this way, we might better account for the performative contradiction of the border, the sense in which it is permeable only to capital, while it remains a decidedly policed frontier for subaltern subjects brought in to do manual labour. In the end, the imposition of urgency, at the level of form, suggests that the minimalist writing, motivated by the ethnographic imperative, struggles to convey the abyssal dysfunction of capitalism, the dispositional dimensions of life that require more than the spatio-materiality and exteriority that the two authors privilege. Nonetheless, just as Cole and Selasi question the category in an onto-phenomenological sense, asking what African literature means in the first place, Bulawayo and Osondu are still caught in the same bind that the dissociating impulses of their counterparts cannot escape, despite their efforts to destabilise the concept of African writing.

Finally, let me return to Latour's intervention in the discussion about our conception of the world, and the implications it has in terms of the manoeuvring room for writers and readers in ethical relation. In the end, Latour's remedial action threatens to leave us again at an impasse. Because he has the impression that Euro-America has long since conflated the concept of world and earth, and that the juridical actions of states have since been marked by this conflation, Latour appreciates that "we have yet to discover what could serve as a plausible *successor* to the notion of the Globe that gave shape to the imperial idea of a universal power grab" (307 *Onus Oribis* original emphasis). Importantly, he maintains that "it remains the task of Europe to metamorphose once again what it means to be 'global'" (307). In other words, it won't do to simply "relinquish the task of carrying the 'burden of the

white man,' if you don't find out why it is that there is a Globe and a burden to be carried. The problem has shifted to that of understanding the globe itself" (307). He concludes on the point that "if there is one responsibility for Europe, it is to find an alternative to the notion of the Globe, which, right now, is a somewhat strange amalgam of the emblems of many successive empires" (309) that have come into being under the banner of 'world' as the empty space in which the foolish games of geopolitics play out. But the double bind seems present even in this somewhat hopeful directive:

> Well it is this exotic vision of nature that Europe, and then more generally the West, has sold to the rest of the word as the real, earthly, natural, material world… And all the other collectives, those who had many other ways of assembling entities, where rendered archaic, exotic, premodern, and irrational by comparison! Am I really wrong in thinking that this is the Globe that is the responsibility of Europe to recall? (319)

Latour uses the metaphor of commercialism to mark the urgency of his rhetorical reading of our world. He underscores the sense in which he uses this term, maintaining that by recall, he means recalling "in the business sense, of bringing back a badly designed production so it is debugged and refitted" (319) Latour's advice is in light of the global disenchantment that concerns Spivak, Jameson, Cheah and Scott alike, who would not object to Latour when he states that "[a]ll the people of the world have bought from us, the Europeans, a product that was supposed to give them access to the secular material world" (319). While it is clear that our political moment calls for an attuning to the temporal dimension of the world, the African migrant writing I have examined may suggests something even more supplementary than a refitted world by Europe, since that too would mean Europe continues to claim the 'mastership of interpellation', and that African writers remain summoned in the sense of being called into being by the other that is Europe, where the ethnographic imperative is sure to emerge, bringing with it an intractable double bind (Spivak "Europe?" 22).

This thesis set out to sketch some of my concerns with spatial understandings of conceptions of world literature, which I have suggested focus primarily on circulation, territoriality, and the movement of the works through and within the literary marketplace. I have argued that this presents a way of understanding the writing I have considered in this thesis as having, primarily, a transactional relationship with the world. This account, rooted in spatial materiality, cannot by itself present the finer spirit of the texts that vexes the

abstract outlines of its own conditions of possibility, namely globality. My discussion of the movements of world literature has lead me to consider the mobilisation of normativity, spirituality and causality in and of African migrant writing.

I began by discussing Pheng Cheah's insistence of the normative conception of the 'world', by far the most thoroughgoing in terms of the theorisation of 'the world' of world literature. Following Cheah, and here enlisting Latour as a credible witness for my closing arguments, I have argued that there is a tendency to take the 'world' at face value, as a self-evident entity, which risks conflating the distinct concepts of globe and world. Working through the various conceptions of world literature, as my reading of the selected texts suggests, it appears that African migrant writing is not concerned with 'world' as merely a descriptive category, which means that it does not only reflect 'the world' created by globalisation that calls it into being. Rather, it has within it an 'active power of world making' which is upheld by a reading for the spiritual impulses of the texts, a reading alongside the market. To be sure, this world making potential is what African migrant writing brings to the table of world literature. A normative world literature engages in a worlding of the world, its causality lies in its power to circumvent the prearranged paradigm of borderless market exchange as constituting a world in itself. In other words, it disrupts the energy of capitalism by showing its crisis ridden status, and thus allowing us to imagine alternative modalities of being. If world literature cannot assume such a posture, its sense of being in the world seems rather limited, coming as a delayed reaction. It is, in Cheah's words, "affected by worldly forces but it cannot be a force in the ongoing cartography and creation of the world that negotiates with and contests the world brought into being by commercial intercourse, monetary transactions, and flows of global mass culture" (37). Given that globality, and thus necessarily the political dimensions of temporality, provide the *mise en scéne* of the thesis, we may suggest that the causality of world literature is, therefore, the extent to which it can allow us to imagine a world away from merely the reflected, presupposed world of economic globalisation. I have suggested that this African migrant writing takes up an interesting position in relation to that challenge.

In the last instance, I argued that African migrant writing is significantly poised to intervene in this impasse, but only if it is allowed the right to its own spirituality, which means that even the term 'African writing', where it elicits a set of expectations whenever it is invoked, becomes unstable. To the extent that these expectations precede the writing in the world literary space, the migrant writing enters into a situation where it has to respond to the call that names it as 'African writing'. In this respect, the works negotiate the double bind of

African migrant writing. The writing takes on a spiritual character, which allows us to approach the works beyond the predicates of diasporic writing, bent towards an identiarian disposition. When they can be read for their spiritual impulses, the works seem active in their refusal to be interpellated and subsumed by *a priori* categories, at which point, they remain open to reception and interpretation beyond predetermined expectations. Quite apart from identity and the encoded rubrics about contemporary African migrant writing, as we have seen, an attention to the spiritual impulses of the texts can illuminate the works' concerns with the condition of the world in globality. If African migrant writing can stage this type of disarticulation, something magical happens to our understanding of world literature. When approached with a certain ethical politics of reading, African migrant writing in globality can insist on its opacity, its spirituality, the qualities of the texts that refuse to be known in advance, the quality of the writing that registers a refusal to be organised merely as an example of identiarian politics in the diaspora. This would be on the level of what Spivak might call 'the aporia of exemplarity', a text that, when it is called in to stand as an example of something, defeats its own logic of exemplarity because it cannot be verified according to the prescripts of *a priori* knowledge, it exceeds the category by which it is interpellated. As I have shown, when African migrant writing stages such a move in this spiritual direction, it not only asks to be read for its negotiation of the double bind, but it also, at the same time, marks a reluctant distance from the crisis of globality.

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